THE REALM OF BELLAKAR

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South of Gondor and Mordor lies the vast desert of Haradwaith. Much of its western expanse lies under the dominion of Bellakar, a warlike kingdom of coasts and hills, lying between the deepest of seas and the most barren of wastelands. Together with the neighboring land of Raj (Bozisha-Miraz) to its southeast, Gondorian maps label Bellakar "Far Harad" (as distinct from Haruzan or "Near Harad"). Bellakar boasts a mix of different cultures: Númenórean, native Bellakaze, Aukuag tribesmen of the desert, Bozishnarod from Raj, and a tribal people from the East called the Tedjin. In such a varied realm, conflict seethes eternally.

THE ELDER DAYS

According to ancient Southron legends, the land of Bellakar was once verdant and lush. Vast forests covered its coastal regions, the most favored of them centered upon a mighty lake set amid the green hills. Further inland, forested highlands rose above endless expanses of grassy savanna and reed marsh.

The Cuind, a tribe of Dark Elves, were the first of the Free Peoples to wander the land, before the first rising of the sun, sharing its starlit trails with Maiarin spirits, wild Hawnin Elves of Nandorin race, and a few clans of restless Dwarves. The Cuind founded the earliest settlements in Bellakar, dwelling in caves about the wooded shores of the great lake and in sheltered vales scattered through the land. The most famous of these havens would later mark the legendary oasis of Khibil Êphalak.

The Age of the Sun brought the awakening of Men into the world. The mysterious Honnin (relatives of the Drughu) were the oldest race of the Secondborn to wander Bellakar extensively. Little attracted to contact with other peoples, their only desire was for solitude and the carving of their watch-stones, a craft in which they excelled. Bellakar knew peace, as wild places knew it, until the powers of the world fought a terrible war in distant Beleriand, and all the lands were ruined or changed.

The drowning of Beleriand in the War of Wrath had lesser, though still cataclysmic, repercussions throughout Middle-earth, one of which was the desiccation of Haradwaith. Within a few centuries, the vast forests of Bellakar had given way to desert. A few sizable oases remained, vestiges of the Elder Days, but only along the coasts did woodlands linger. To these forests the Honnin removed. The other ancient dwellers of the land, spirits and Elves and Dwarves, hid themselves in secret places or fled far away. It is not uncommon in the desert or even in an oasis to find watch-stones and rock paintings—evidence of one-time Honnin occupation. Some tales tell that guardian spirits linger in these places, ready to punish trespassers.

The Cuind left their refuges in Khibil Êphalak and around the blessed lake in the once green hills at the beginning of the Second Age, separating into two groups. The smaller refused to abandoned their homeland, moved to hidden oases in the Auz Azunan, the "Hills of the Spiritual People," and to a secret refuge in the Urîd an-Abâr, where they established flet-villages. The larger group fled Bellakar for greener lands, and, under their leader Elor, migrated across the southwesternmost peninsula of Endor, settling in the forest of Drel. Like the Honnin, those few Cuind and Hawnin who remained in Bellakar had very few relations with the later inhabitants of that land.

NÚMENÓREAN COLONIZATION (SA 1-2029)

As the Second Age drew on, other Men, hunters and herdsmen from the mountains east of the great desert, established themselves along the coasts. Some taught themselves to sail the ocean in small but sturdy boats. They drew fish, squid and seal from the waters. Others found patches of good land for farm and orchard; they sustained themselves on wheat, olives, dates and grapes.

The people who took their livelihood from the sea could also sail to other harbors. They began to trade amongst themselves, learning the languages of other tribes. Scattered along hundreds of leagues of coastline, these people named themselves the Bellanarod (sing. Bellanar). When Númenórean mariners first set foot on the shores of Bellakar around 1100, they found a strong, village-dwelling people where the desert meets the sea.

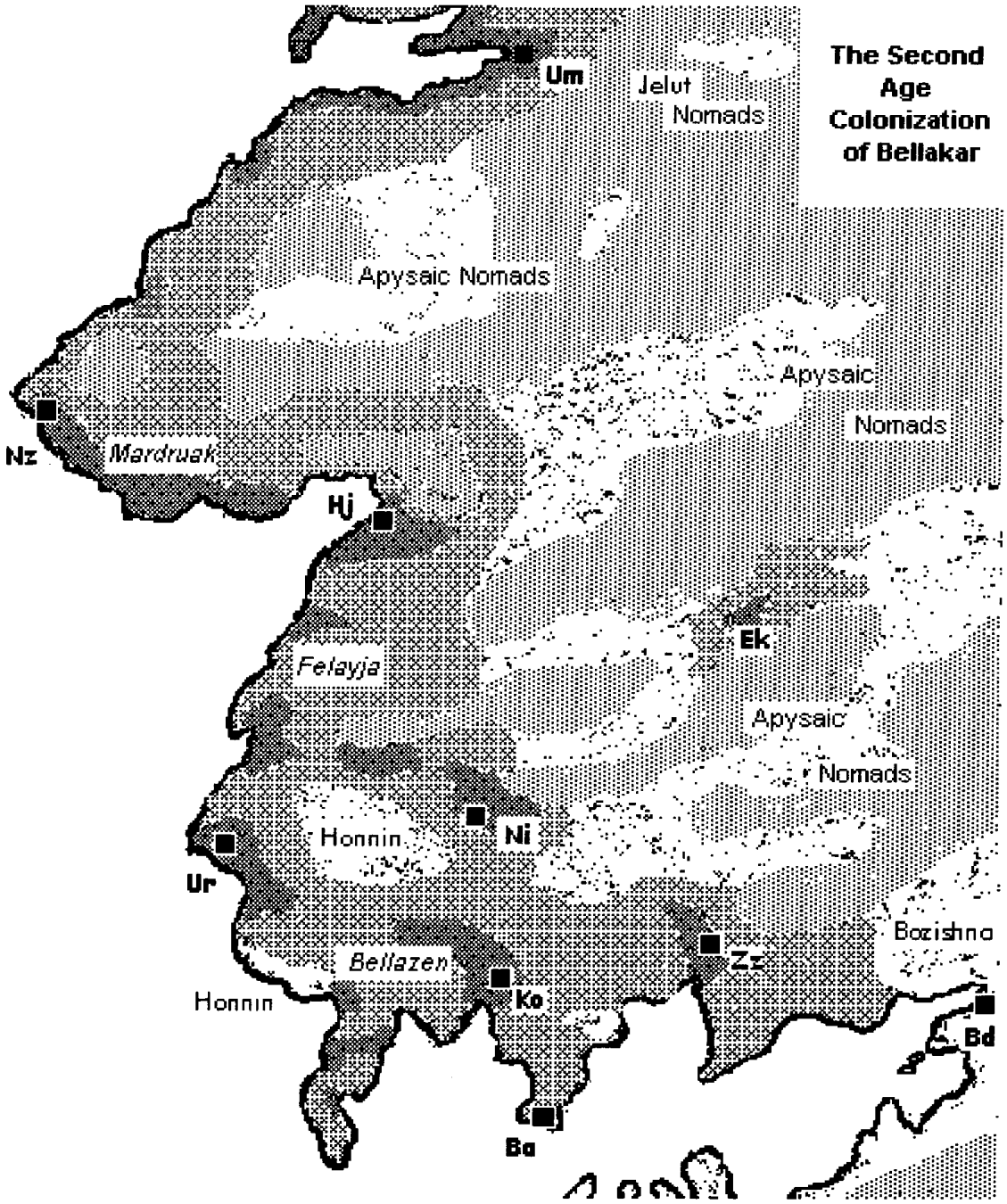
Of their distant past the Bellanarod spoke little to the Númenóreans, but in time the loremasters of the Dúnedain pieced together native myths and legends enough to recognize that the Bellanarod must have enjoyed some contact with the "Azunan," the Elvish peoples, a gift they had thought peculiar to their race. The name Bellakar itself appeared to have been derived from an Avarin equivalent to *Belegaer*, the Grey-elven name for the sea. Perhaps Felayja too, the Bellanara name for the coasts, originated from some Dark Elven form of *Falas*. But whatever connections might once have existed between the fisher-folk and the Azunan had long since fallen into oblivion, and eager Númenórean quests to locate lost Elven tribes in the land met with no success.

The fisher-folk of the Bellanarod stood in awe of the Númenóreans, whose ships towered over them like the houses of the gods. They allowed the Númenóreans to settle around their harbors and bays, learning from them and teaching them, in turn, the wisdom of life on a desert coast. The clans who allowed the newcomers to live among them acquired their lore and sometimes even mixed bloodlines with them.

As cities grew up around the Númenórean colonies, a permanent social and political order came into being, identifiable as that of the *Bellakaranî,* the people of Bellakar, distinct from other nations and tribes of Harad. In each Bellakarian city-state, a council of powerful elders decided matters of law and justice. In some cities these ruling oligarchies consisted entirely of the "Adûnâi," wealthy citizens of traceable and purely Dúnadan descent. Among themselves they spoke only the traditional tongues of Númenor: Adûnaic and Sindarin (and later only Adûnaic). In other cities, the "mixed-blooded" class, known as the Bellakaze, held some share of wealth and power. They spoke a language as mixed as their heritage (also called "Bellakaze") that became the speech of trade and lore all through Bellakar, even penetrating into the remote villages and desert trading stations where they treated with the wandering nomads of the Haradwaith.

The rising power of the Bellakaze came in spite of the refusal of most of the Adûnâi to recognize any of the "Lesser Men" of Middle-earth as their equals in judgment and character. It also came at the expense of the Bellanarod, the purely Southron people who still made up the majority of the population of the cities and an even higher proportion of the village peasantry subject to those cities. To be a Bellanar was to learn humility, to be limited in what one could achieve in the way of wealth and social position. When the cities were well-ruled and at peace, this divided way of life served the Bellakaranî well enough. Leaders could talk of the "three strong hands, held together" to support the nation. When war, religion or politics caused pain and conflict, the three hands would become claws to tear at one another's flesh.

In the 12th and 13th centuries of the Second Age, the



Númenórean Guild of Venturers began crossing the sea directly from their ports in Númenor. Taking the great Cape of Mardruak as their landfall and using Bellakarian ports, they explored the whole of Bellakar, including its arid lands. In the following centuries, slowly, over many lives of Men, Númenóreans came to colonize the coasts of Middle-earth, and ties between the Bellakaze and the Men of the West grew stronger. Concubinage of Bellakaze women was not uncommon among the colonists, and on some rare occasions even legally recognized marriages took place. The mixed-blooded race resulting from these unions would become a powerful and wealthy political faction in Bellakar over the centuries. In the Third Age of Middle-earth they would be so increased in numbers as to *become* the Bellakaze, a durable and true foundation for the future sovereign kingdom of Bellakar.

In 1288 Númenóreans under the leadership of Ciryandur, Captain of the Venturers and cousin to Tar-Súrion the king, took haven at the mouth of a river which they named Rothló. The place of Ciryandur's landing became the site for the first permanent Dúnadan colony in Bellakar: Hazaj Tollin (a name of Bellakaze origin). A second significant foundation appeared in 1487 at the inland oasis of Ithillond, as an outpost of Hazaj Tollin, then seeking to exercise control over the emerging caravan trade westward into Bellazen and the Felayja. Other important coastal settlements were established by the Guild of Venturers in 1644 at Ost Doranor and in 1780 at Thorombar, both becoming important cities with the passage of years.

The Númenóreans were not the only colonizers staking claims on the coasts of Bellakar. The Bozishnarod of Raj, began a long tradition of challenging the commercial supremacy of Númenor on the Bay of Tulwang with the foundation of the lucrative entrepôt of Najmol. To close this uncertain frontier on the eastern flank of their growing colonies, the Dúnedain laid the foundation of Korlea in 1975, uprooting local tribes and supplanting Bozishnara influence.

In 2022, under Tar-Ciryatan of Númenor, this patchwork of settlements achieved coherence through the institution of the Council of Free Cities, a loose federation governed by an elected body. Initiative for this decree came from Aldamir II, lord of Hazaj Tollin, the most prominent city of the league.

For the colonists, "freedom" meant exemption from tribute, not independence from Númenor (subordination to the Line of Elros being inseparable from their religious and cultural identity). But Tar-Ciryatan, greedy for wealth, began to oppress the Men of Middle-earth, sending his servants to seize gems and precious metals from its peoples. The mixed ancestry of the Bellakaranî naturally gave cause for concern—would they too become subject to these exactions as were the Bellanarod? Anxious to preserve

his reputation as a benefactor to the colonists, Ciryatan granted Aldamir's prayer that Bellakaze and Adûnâi alike should enjoy immunity from tribute.

DIPLOMACY AND INSURRECTION (SA 2029-2222)

The precarious nature of Tar-Ciryatan's concession soon revealed itself in his still more rapacious heir, Tar-Atanamir the Great, who upon his accession in 2029 unceremoniously reversed his father's decree. A heavy tribute was now demanded of all the cities of Bellakar. Its exaction, however, was not easily effected, since several cities refused to pay, and the king had no loyal officials or garrisons in the colonies.

A royal envoy was sent to Hazaj Tollin and Thorombar, the largest and richest of the cities, making it clear to their lords that Atanamir was prepared to enforce his will with military might if need be. Never before in their history had a Númenórean king threatened the Bellakaranî with war. Realizing the hopelessness of such a conflict, the terrified colonists submitted to the king's command.

Atanamir soon perceived that he might increase his revenues still further by treating with each of the colonies of Bellakar individually, playing upon inter-city rivalries to intensify competition for royal favor. The king promised a reduction of tribute to those cities that pledged other sources of income to the Sceptre. This offer precipitated strife within and among the cities because the Dúnadan ruling classes sought to shift the burden of royal finance upon the Bellakaze and Bellanarod, while the more martially-inclined cities found pretexts to invade or plunder neighboring territories in quest of wealth to feed the king's coffers.

The Bellanarod lost what little freedom they had preserved in the slums of the cities and in the villages beyond the Númenórean colonial strongholds. They were battered into submission, imprisoned and embittered by their own poverty. The chaotic environment that had developed in Bellakar thus doubly served the interests of the Númenórean monarch: it increased his revenues and diverted the military strength of the colonies away from rebellion against his authority.

In the end, however, Atanamir's attempt to keep his subjects in check failed. Repression and wastage eroded the loyalties of all the Bellakaranî. The constant threat of war brutalized their rulers and left the cities with a dangerous overburden of ships and restless warriors. In 2222, soon after Atanamir's death and the accession of his son Ancalimon, the new lord of Hazaj Tollin, Ciryandur II, took the title of Tar-Heruhyarmen, "Lord of the South," a manifest act of rebellion against the Line of Elros. Having recently forged an alliance between his own city and those of Thorombar and Ost Doranor, Ciryandur launched a vigorous propaganda campaign, justifying insurrection against the "Tyranny of Armenelos."

Ciryandur argued that by treating the Dúnedain no differently than the Bellakaze, Atanamir and his successor were denying them their Númenórean heritage. In Númenor itself, moreover, Atanamir had recently rebuffed the emissaries of the Valar. His son had now compounded this act of impiety by acknowledging the party of the Ârûwanâi, the "King's Men," as his favored supporters, alienating the "Faithful," who supported the traditional ties with the Valar and the Elves, and also the more vigorous colonial factions in Middle-earth. Many of the Ârûwanâi saw these political enemies as impure, less Dúnadan in thought and blood, than those born and living in Númenor and having their first loyalties to the monarchy. As Ciryandur saw it, the Line of Elros had therefore given up any claim to rule by the Grace of the Valar. Far from being an act of impiety, revolt against the king had become the sacred duty of all true Dúnedain.

This propaganda was ingeniously formulated and brilliantly timed—and no doubt genuinely believed by Ciryandur and many of his supporters—but it held two tragic flaws. Eager though the colonists might be to restore ancestral parity with their kinsfolk in Númenor, not all were willing to accept Ciryandur as "king"—a mere exchange of one tyrant for another, in the eyes of the factious cities. The second flaw in Ciryandur's rhetoric was that it spoke only to the Dúnadan elite of the colonies, ignoring the grievances of the more numerous Bellakaranî. These miscalculations proved to be the undoing of Ciryandur's designs.

THE FIFTEEN YEARS WAR (SA 2222-2250)

For the first year of the conflict, Ciryandur had great success. The majority of the cities, most of their soldiery, and virtually all of their warships, fell under his control. Númenor itself was home only to a small, elite royal army and a fleet intended mainly to keep pirates away from the king's ships bringing tribute from Endor. If all the harbors of Bellakar could be secured by the rebellion, Ancalimon might be forced to negotiate a resolution to the conflict or face a war so prolonged that the other colonies might be unwilling to support it.

As Ancalimon was marshaling a fleet and army in Númenor to suppress Ciryandur's revolt, Mornion II, lord of Korlea, following the custom of the Ârûwanâi, changed his name to its Adûnaic form, Mûrathôr, thereby aligning himself with the party of the King's Men, and attacked Hazaj Tollin by surprise. Korlea had been founded as a royal garrison against the expansion of the Bozishnarod and was regarded with suspicion by the other cities of Bellakar.

Mûrathôr perceived that, if he were to crush the rebellion before the arrival of the king's forces, Ancalimon would favor Korlea, just as Atanamir and other kings had done before him. Mûrathôr's gambit was a success, even though he failed to capture Ciryandur's capital. A few other cities of Bellakar not already allied with Hazaj Tollin followed Mûrathôr's lead. The king now had ports and fortresses in southern Bellakar. His fleet could be landed, his spies could seek support among the Bellakaze. The war was slow and brutal: some cities were besieged, captured and sacked, the country was devastated, but the Bellakaranî fought back fiercely. The conflict lasted fifteen years and ended when both sides were too exhausted to go on.

In 2237 the rebellious cities accepted peace terms and were placed under the supervision of Mûrathôr's successors and allies. The Council of Free Cities was formally abolished in 2240. The "stewardship" of the rebel cities by the ascendant Ârûwanâi lasted a century, after which their autonomy (though not freedom from tribute) was restored. The destruction, loss of life, and acts of cruelty that accompanied the Fifteen Years War left the survivors with a bitter taste in their mouths.

The victory of Mûrathôr polarized the colonists, as there were many in Bellakar (particularly in Hazaj Tollin and Ithillond) who were never able to completely reconcile themselves with the party of the King's Men. Nevertheless, the attitudes and customs of the Ârûwanâi came to dominate the Númenóreans of Bellakar. This was seen especially in the assertion of Bellakarian commercial privilege in the Bozishnara port of Najmol, which precipitated a bloodless but strong-handed political takeover of the city in 2240 by a cabal of mercantile interests based in Thorombar, Hazaj Tollin and Ost Doranor as well as Korlea. To make clear to the Bozishnarod that the Adûnâi would tolerate no rivalry on the Azra'm-Miraz, they renamed the haven Balkuzôr, the first city of Bellakar to receive an Adûnaic name.

But it was not simply the local dominance of Mûrathôr's party that inspired this kind of behavior. Larger events were brewing that would decisively transform the whole of the South into the heartland of Ârûwanâ influence in Middle-earth. A mere ten years after Ancalimon had crushed Bellakar's hopes for independence, a new and greater insurrection reared its ugly head to trouble his reign.

THE WAR OF THE RENEGADES (SA 2250-2280)

To the south of Bellakar, beyond the sprawling Bay of Tulwang, stretched the vast Númenórean dominions named after Ancalimon's grandfather: Ciryatanórë. Originally a coastal colony like Bellakar, in the 20th century Ciryatanórë's inland frontiers exploded north and east before the armies of its aggressive lord, Herundil, grand-nephew of Tar-Ciryatan, destined to become the Ringwraith Akhôrahil. For seven decades Herundil violently pushed the sphere of Númenórean hegemony across the breadth of Haradwaith until his soldiers set foot upon the shores of the Bay of Ormal in the east, blazing a corridor along the northern feet of the Yellow Mountains.

Two and a half centuries of uninterrupted Númenórean domination followed, making Ciryatanórë the most important source of royal tribute in Endor. In spite of his preeminence as the quintessential vassal of Armenelos, however, Herundil did precious little to aid his royal cousin in the suppression of Ciryandur's revolt, though he could easily have done so, considering the vast military power he now wielded. Herundil's inactivity drew suspicion upon him in Númenor: had he hoped for the victory of the Bellakarian rebels, waiting for his opportunity to break away from the king and claim Ciryatanórë as an independent realm?

These fears were entirely justified. In 2250, before an astounded ambassador from Armenelos, Herundil renounced his allegiance to the Line of Elros. In token of his claim upon Ancalimon's lands in Middle-earth, Herundil took the title of Tar-Raumoher, the Storm King, an epithet derived from his conquests. (The Men of Haradwaith used to speak fearfully of Herundil's marauding armies as the "Storms of Westernesse.") To dramatize his breach with the heir of Ciryatan, Herundil erased the dead king's name from the land, renaming it Dor Alagothrim, Realm of Storm-host.

But worse was yet to come. Not only did Herundil sever his ties with Armenelos, he also openly declared himself an ally of Sauron of Mordor. Herundil had long been in secret alliance with the Dark Lord, who had granted him one of the nine Rings of Power following the conclusion of his campaigns of conquest in 2000. Herundil would no longer conceal his true loyalties from the eyes of the king. The time had come to challenge the might of Númenor.

But Herundil would not stand alone, for there was another Númenórean renegade who wielded a Ring of Power over the sands of Haradwaith. This was Ard the Vain (as her Haruze subjects called her; her birth-name was Andúniel, which she no longer used except in its Adûnaic form—*Adûnaphel*—whenever she needed to make a pretense of loyalty to the king). Her treachery had begun long before that of Herundil. Though, like him, Ard desired dominion over Men, for many years she restrained her ambitions, carving out a native domain in Haruzan which she quietly ruled from Vamag on the Cape of Umbar, always submitting outwardly to the will of Ciryatan and his heirs.

Now, however, with Herundil's bold renunciation of Armenelos, Ard perceived that the time for secret plots was soon to be past. While Tar-Ancalimon and his Ârûwanâ allies in western Middle-earth mustered for war, she declared her loyalty once again, but sent messengers to the Storm King, urging him to coordinate their actions in northern and southern Harad and so prevent the union of the King's Men against either one of them. The rebellious lord of Dor Alagothrim gave heed to Ard's counsel, and laid his plans.

As a stronghold of the Ârûwanâi, the city of Korlea was not slow in taking measures to strengthen its coastlands against any potential threats from a now hostile Tulwang, the province of the Storm King's empire that faced Bellakar from across the bay of the same name. Five years after Herundil's declaration of rebellion, a Korlean military colony, Târik an-Narduvî, was founded in order to maintain control of the sea-lanes opposite the Teeth of Kanjar on the Tulwang coast, thereby also protecting with Balkuzôr access to Sîres Bay. But the Men of Korlea restrained their warriors, awaiting the word of their king.

The War of the Renegades, in which Tar-Ancalimon put down the challenges to his sovereignty in Middle-earth, took place in 2280. Both Umbar and Bellakar were commanded to field armies on their king's behalf, but only Bellakar answered the summons. The failure of Umbar to send assistance to Ancalimon's war against Dor Alagothrim was due to Ard's intervention.

Even before the summons came, she unleashed her Haruze forces upon provincial Umbar, overrunning the coastal settlements along the Cape of Umbar and driving south to overwhelm Umbar's colonial forces before they could be reinforced from Númenor or Pelargir. Her main army, however, was routed by the well-disciplined Númenórean infantry at a narrow place in the coastal hills, Cirith Glingal, within sight of the Bay of Umbar. She was eventually forced to abandon Vamag and Haruzan for the mountain marches of Mordor, beyond the reach of the Dúnedain.

Herundil too met with an unexpected reversal, thanks to the Ârûwanâi of Bellakar. During the thirty-year interim between Herundil's renunciation of the king and the arrival of Ancalimon's fleet, Ârûzîr son of Mûrathôr, lord of Korlea, had endeavored to foment unrest in Tulwang. Ârûzîr was also successful in rallying support against the conqueror among the Haradrim of Bozisha-Miraz and Sîrayn. Through bribery and promises of royal (and Korlean) favor, Ârûzîr induced the port-cities of northern Tulwang to betray Herundil and open their harbors to the ships of the king. Using these harbors as a base, the Mardruak horseman of Bellakar and the Gusar cavalry of Bozisha-Miraz were able to sweep southward across Tulwang and seize several small ports on its borders with the core territory of Dor Alagothrim.

Beset and blinded by Haradon attacks from the deserts all along his northern frontier, and unaware of the suborning of his subjects on this critical front, Herundil was beside himself with rage when a fleet and army from Númenor, Bellakar, Hyarnúmentë and Mírenórë made their landing unopposed on his coasts. It was a fatal blow to all his well-laid plans; for now his general, Vaiwatan, who had been absent in his eastern dominions raising troops, was too far away to prevent Ancalimon's forces from marching into the heart of the Storm King's realm. Vaiwatan moved with great speed to concentrate what troops were available to block the Númenórean advance, but his army was met and defeated by the King's Men near the oasis of Fult, and soon thereafter the victorious Ârûwanâi burnt and razed Herundil's capital of Barad Annûn.

Though his body was never recovered, it was believed by the victors that Herundil perished in the conflagration of Barad Annûn. But it was not so. He fled instead into the fastness of the Yellow Mountains, hoping to rally his loyal supporters and gather another army. However, Sauron had studied carefully the destructive potential of Númenórean might as it vented its wrath against his allies in Haruzan and Dor Alagothrim. He considered further resistance futile, and deemed that the time for calling upon Herundil's debt to him had arrived.

Reciting words of power that now bound Herundil's soul to him through the darkest of sorceries, Sauron summoned him to Mordor. The would-be Storm King found himself riding and marching across the wastes of Haradwaith against his will, accompanied by a few terrified servants, every step a torment of shame and fear. Eventually he crossed the Mountains of Shadow and came to Barad-dûr, to stand alone before the Dark Lord on his dark throne. His new master stripped him of his raiment of flesh, damning his soul to eternal slavery as a bodiless wraith, in the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie.

THE NEW ORDER (SA 2280-2638)

Tar-Ancalimon's victory was also a victory for the Ârûwanâi, because it meant that they, as the king's loyalists, would enjoy the fruits of power in the new political order—not only in Umbar and Bellakar, but over the remnants of Herundil's shattered empire, which now awaited a new leadership worthy of Ancalimon's trust. The far-flung eastern domains of the Storm King—Chennacatt, Sîrayn and Harshandatt—were as yet unsubjugated, but Tulwang and Ciryatanórë proper now lay totally under Ancalimon's control, ripe for reordering.

Ancalimon's first act was to issue a decree that, in recognition of their loyalty to him, all lands where the Ârûwanâi held sway should abandon their Eldarin names in exchange for names of the Adûnaic tongue. Ciryatanórë was renamed yet again *Anbalukkhôr*. So too with its southern neighbors: Hyarnúmentë became *Khâradûnê*, Mírenórë *Zimrathâni*. Bellakar followed suit: Ithillond became *Nîlûlôni*, the coastal road of Men Falas *Batân an-Sakal*, Ost Doranor *Ûrêzâyan* and Thorombar *Narîk-zadan*. Even rivers changed their names: Rothló became the *Rôthurush* and Lhúchir the *Lôkhurush*.

The king rejected the request of Herundil's son, Lôkhuzôr, to govern in his father's stead. Though he hated his father and had become an ardent follower of the Ârûwanâi in Númenor, Lôkhuzôr was regarded with grave suspicion by his countrymen, having been born of an incestuous union between Herundil and his sister. But even had the king thought better of Lôkhuzôr, he still would have denied him his petition. Ancalimon was hardly prepared to entrust this rebellious region to a dynastic succession.

Instead, Ancalimon divided the lands under his control into three provinces: Northern and Southern Tulwang, and coastal Anbalukkhôr. The administration of these regions was entrusted to five regents: Ârûzîr of Korlea for Northern Tulwang; Imrazôr, lord of Inzillôni in Khâradûnê, for Southern Tulwang; Anbalukkhôr would be jointly governed by Dâiruzôr of Târik an-Narduvî, Zagarkhâd of Khâradûnê, and Zagarthôr of Zimrathâni. In theory, the king could transfer the regency to anyone he pleased, but in practice the honor became hereditary to certain families.

These regents would form a council, the Bâitha'n-Khôrî, that would meet annually at the site of Barad Annûn (to be rebuilt as *Zadan an-Adûn*) on behalf of the royal interest. The authority of each of the Khôrî would be coeval with the others, and any resolution would require the assent of the majority except in war (during which time they would submit to the rule of an elected chief). A chief regent would function during peacetime as well, but the tenure of their office would be limited to five years and could not be repeated, being rotated according to their country of origin: first Korlea, next Khâradûnê, then Zimrathâni.

Korlea thus came to exercise hegemony over both the northern and southern coasts of the Bay of Tulwang, giving it exclusive control over the maritime trade routes to Bozisha-Dar (a privilege which it did not hesitate to enforce, levying substantial tariffs on merchant vessels and winning new political allies through the distribution of exemptions). Korlea soon became the wealthiest city of Bellakar, and its domestic territory continued to grow through colonization or forcible imposition on its neighbors.

In 2452, Korlea and its easternmost colony of Târik an-Narduvî (now a power in its own right) concluded a treaty defining Korlea and its allies as a distinct and privileged region within Bellakar. This domain, created by fiat, pushed the traditional boundaries of Korlea north and east of the Lôkhurush vale to encompass that of the Sîres also, thus embracing both river crossings of the Batân an-Sakal as well as driving a wedge between it and the territory of Nîlûlôni. Together, Korlea and Târik an-Narduvî would dominate both land and sea routes through Bellakar, thus draining the lifeblood of its other cities.

This was the last straw for those cities still free of Korlean influence. Korlea was aiming for total mastery over Bellakar, and its victims were bereft of any institutions by which to oppose its strong-handed tactics. Armed resistance was out of the question: deprived of two major sources of income, the Bellakarian cities were barely able to render the annual tribute to the king, much less maintain a fighting force beyond the city guard.

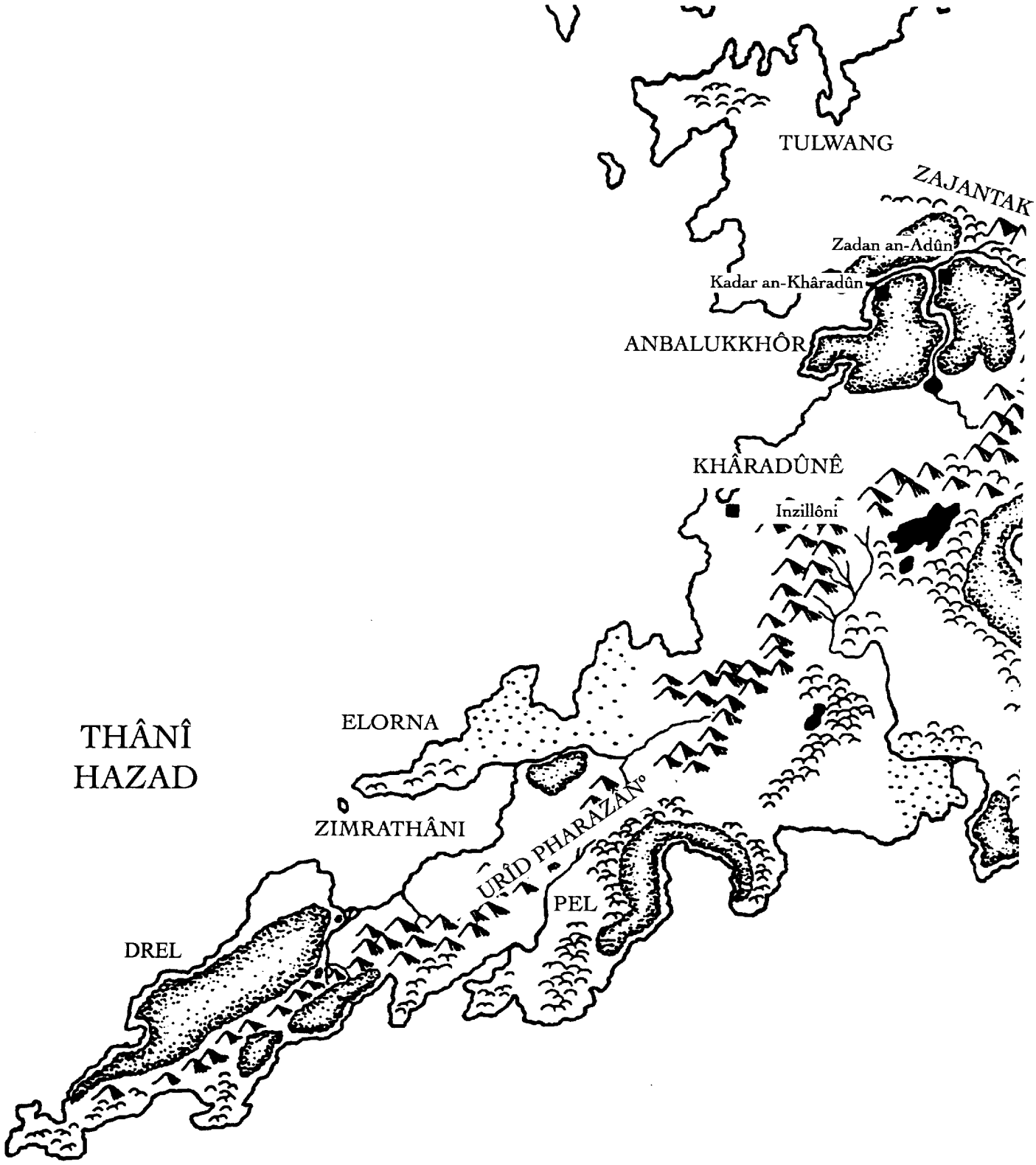
But diplomacy proved equally futile, for Tar-Telemmaitë, Ancalimon's son and successor, was an avaricious monarch, concerned only with his own wealth. Bellakarian pleas for him to curb Korlean aggrandizement fell on deaf ears when Korlean ambassadors informed the king that their territorial expansion was being made in order to conduct a thorough search of the Auz Bekar for possible sources of *mithril* (a ruse supported by appropriate testimony from bribed geological experts and surveyors from Umbar). Unfortunately for the Bellakaranî, it took Telemmaitë 74 years after the Korlean expansion to die and be succeeded by a more just and sensible ruler.

This was Herucalmo, who from 2526 governed Númenor and its colonies in the name of his idle wife, Tar-Vanimeldë. While not overly sympathetic towards cities with a history of rebellion, Herucalmo was at least pragmatic enough to realize that, should Korlean power be left free to wax unfettered, the revenues of Bellakar would soon all be flowing into Korlean rather than royal coffers. He accordingly restored the lands of the Sîres valley to Nîlûlôni, confining Korlea's territory to its pre-2452 boundaries (though allowing it to retain its privileged status as a domain exempt from the laws that bound other Bellakarian cities).

Herucalmo outlived his queen, succeeding upon her death in 2637 as Tar-Anducal. Four centuries had now passed since the War of the Renegades, and southern Middle-earth had become a very different place. The King's Men had long since ceased to be a distinct "party" in Númenórean politics. By and large, the ideals and mores they promulgated had by this time saturated Adûnaic culture as a whole. While this made the world a safer place for the *imperium* of Armenelos, it also blunted the exclusive political leverage once enjoyed by the Ârûwanâi over against other loyal subjects of the Sceptre.

Under Anducal's rule, the shift in power resulting from this change was felt in both Bellakar and its southern neighbors. For the latter it meant the dissolution of the Bâitha'n-Khôrî. Vexed at the irresponsible use of Tulwang and Anbalukkhôr for the self-aggrandizement of their neighbors (and its undesirable effects on the royal tribute), Anducal terminated the Bâitha and reunified its three provinces into a single lordship centered in Anbalukkhôr. Surrounded as it now was on all sides by Ârûwanâ colonies loyal to the Line of Elros, the prospect of (and indeed motivation for) revolt had subsided.

The new lord of Anbalukkhôr, Azrubên of Rómenna, was a powerful Ârûwanâ noble, recently joined in marriage to the royal house, who had proven his worthiness and competence through years of service as Herucalmo's factor in Southlands. Azrubên shared the king's attitude towards the political situation on the



Bay of Tulwang, and lost no time in curtailing Bellakarian influence there. In this he found an important ally in Abârhîn, the lord of Balkuzôr.

Although a natural ally of Korlea, Abârhîn's city had suffered economically from the high tolls placed on imports originating from its ancient mother-city of Bozisha-Dar. Since Balkuzôr had not participated in Ciryandur's revolt and had shown its quality in

the War of the Renegades, Abârhîn's representations to the lord of Anbalukkhôr were not handicapped by the stigma attached to ambassadors sent by the cities of northern Bellakar.

Azrubên's efforts to break Korlea's stranglehold on the sea-lanes immediately ingratiated him among the Bozishnarod, thereby securing his interests in that direction. His actions impressed upon the king that the situation in Bellakar was quite different from that of Anbalukkhôr. There the problem was precisely the reverse: it was the growing power of Korlea that was causing the deterioration of its neighboring colonies. Anducal's solution, prompted by the counsels of Azrubên and Abârhîn, was to reinstate the Council of Free Cities—the Bâitha'n-Kadîr—in 2638.

THE BÂITHA'N-KADÎR (SA 2638-3100)

Abârhîn of Balkuzôr did not find it difficult to persuade the other cities (apart from Korlea, which stood to lose from it) to adopt the new arrangement, which contributed to definitively cementing relations among the cities, as well as gradually ensuring the preeminence of Hazaj Tollin. Anducal chose Hazaj Tollin as a meeting place for this Bâitha because its distance from Korlea contributed to the balance of power he sought to effect.

But though it was to be governed, like its predecessor, by an elected body of councilors called *aʒapthubêthî* (sing. *aʒapthubêth*), the organization of the new league differed significantly from the old. Executive authority over the cities (and responsibility for collecting the royal tribute) would now be held jointly by three *aʒapthubêthî,* annually elected by the combined citizenries of the league. In addition, a standing army was formed that would coexist with the militia of the individual colonies.

By its integration of monarchic, aristocratic and democratic principles, Bellakar in some ways came to resemble the republic of Koronandë in the Mûmakan, in the south of Endor, or the free cities of the Pelargirean league on Belfalas Bay in the northwest. Neither of these were well thought of by the Ârûwanâi; the first was a creation of native Endorians, the second a haven for the Faithful. Both realms made alliance with Elves. However, the king thought that the quarrelsome Bellakarian cities were suited to such a regime and could be pacified by a small gift of freedom.

If the Bâitha portended an easing of tensions among the Adûnâi of Bellakar, it did little to conciliate the native element. To the Bellanarod of the Sîres valley, domination by Nîlûlôni differed little from life under the thumb of Korlea or Balkuzôr. To Pon Agar, a Bellakaze nobleman whose family's influence over the vale had seen better days, the institution of the Bâitha was but the final nail in the coffin of Southron dominance in the region.

After eight years of failed attempts to win concessions from the Bâitha, Pon Agar decided to take back the lower Sîres by force. A hard-headed realist, Pon Agar knew that the Bellanarod could not stand alone against the union of the Adûnaic cities—even were he to succeed in soliciting the aid of his countrymen in Bozisha-Dar. But there existed another, largely untapped, power which, if roused, might bring the Kadîr to their knees. These were the desert nomads of the Auz Bekar with whom the Agar clan had strong ties from time immemorial.

Through persuasion, payment and promises of shared control over the desert trade routes, Pon Agar secured the swords of the Aukuag in his cause. The Aukuag in turn won over some of their kinsmen on the Cape of Mardruak, who were poised to threaten Narîk-zadan and Hazaj Tollin, the northernmost cities of the Bâitha. The alliance was completed by the participation of the Bozishnarod of the Forest Coast and the Covshek nomads of Sud Sicanna.

In 2646 this coalition of embittered Southrons fell hard upon Mardruak and the inland frontiers of Bellakar. Never having experienced a coordinated, large-scale assault from the desert, the Kadîr were unprepared and their territories suffered great loss and destruction. Seeing the straits into which the fledgling Bâitha had plunged, Tar-Anducal commanded Inzilkhâd, one of his trusted captains in Umbar, to crush the revolt. Inzilkhâd knew well the mind of the nomads of Haradwaith, having long dealt with the Jelut tribes on Umbar's own borders. If the instigators of the uprising were crushed, the desert raiders would soon lose momentum and withdraw from the coastal regions.

Inzilkhâd landed a strong force at the mouth of the Sîres late in 2647, just seven miles downriver from Pon Agar's headquarters at Gull Rock, a granite butte that housed a shrine to Ladnoca the Moon. Deploying auxiliaries from Korlea and Balkuzôr to screen his infantry from the nomads, Inzilkhâd laid siege to Gull Rock and captured its summit by stratagem. Pon Agar and the defenders were massacred, and the rebellion came to an end soon afterwards.

The Bâitha'n-Kadîr was here to stay. But so was Inzilkhâd, receiving permission from Tar-Anducal the following year to erect a military colony on Gull Rock. Inzilkhâd named this city Zimra-zadan, the House of the Jewel, after the glittering, ruby-walled caves by whose secret passage he had taken the enemy stronghold. The incorporation of Zimra-zadan into the Bâitha definitively set the boundary between Bellakar and Bozisha-Miraz.

Over the next two centuries, the Kadîr continued to supplant Bozishnara influence along Bellakar's desert frontier, culminating in the induction of the oasis-town of Khibil Êphalak into the league in 2849. Four years earlier, men from Nîlûlôni had discovered significant deposits of copper near the site of a long-deserted Cuind settlement during an exploration of the inner reaches of the Auz Bekar, and a few years later, a small Númenórean colony sprung up. The inclusion of this distant oasis ensured a constant connection to the caravan routes for Nîlûlôni, since the new colony, even more so than the other cities of Bellakar, did not possess enough arable land to become self-sufficient.

Khibil Êphalak also served to counterbalance the unceasing efforts by Korlea to dominate the league economically. More importantly, though, it extended the gaze of the Adûnâi beyond the narrow confines of their seaward lands, opening their eyes to a vast continental expanse, where an old power was rising anew.

THE NELEGAJE (SA 3100-3260)

In 2280, Sauron judged that his strength was not yet sufficient to challenge Númenórean supremacy in Middle-earth. But now, nigh on a millennium later, his strength had grown great indeed. At first, the Dark Lord contented himself with clandestine attempts to goad the colonies into renewed rebellion against their king. He essayed this through spies sent to subvert influential individuals to his worship, all the while deflecting attention from Sauron's machinations by preying upon Númenórean distrust of the increasingly oppressed Bellakaze and Bellanarod.

Númenor's overweening pride of race caused the Bellakaze to be gradually stripped of political power, while its increasing decadence and greed crushed the Bellanarod with taxes and tribute. Both groups showed increasing bitterness toward their rulers, bringing a dark fear to the Dúnadan masters of the cities. If some leading Númenórean citizen was murdered, or a conflict born—in short, if any evil befell the Kadîr—blame was subtly shifted to the natives.

When Sauron's efforts to shake the loyalty of the Adûnâi failed,

he reversed his tactics, appealing instead to the increasingly stigmatized Bellakaze and Bellanarod. This time Sauron succeeded, since the grievances his emissaries cited were real. Blocked from an open invasion of Bellakar due to its natural defenses of desert and sea, Sauron's agents inspired the populace to revolt against their Dúnadan overlords. This uprising, called the Nelegaje or "Grievance Revolt," involved mainly the Bellakaze, with Bellanarod and Aukuag allies. It was dragged out by prolonged guerilla warfare throughout the Bellakarian hinterland.

The Nelegaje broke out in concert with a number of other intrigues and more direct assaults by allies of the Dark Lord, all aimed at Númenórean coastal dominions during the late 3100s and early 3200s. Because of its strategic insulation from Mordor and its position astride the sea passage between Endor and Númenor, Bellakar was one of the first theaters of action for Pharazôn son of Gimilkhâd, kinsman of Tar-Palantir the king, who led the Númenórean reprisal against Sauron's incursions. With the assistance of this daring captain, the Bâitha'n-Kadîr managed to suppress the Bellakaze and their Bellanara allies beginning in 3240, enabling Pharazôn to use Bellakar as a secure base of operations for his campaigns further north and south.

Pharazôn ingratiated himself with the Bâitha by setting its affairs in order and restraining his troops from despoiling colonists. His harsh treatment of the rebels, on the other hand, won him little favor from that quarter. They had been humbled but not reconciled, and not long after Pharazôn withdrew his forces in 3243 they revolted again, seeing no hope of restoring their fortunes by peaceful means.

The resumption of hostilities, though in harmony with the Dark Lord's designs, scarcely required his prompting at this point. This second insurrection, however, proved less of a threat to the Kadîr, since the strength of the rebels had been greatly weakened in the Nelegaje. No appeal for royal military assistance was required. Defeated, the Bellakaranî that still held out withdrew into the hinterland and occupied defensible positions that lay far from the zone of Númenórean hegemony; the Adûnâi, content with having rid themselves of the most troublesome element of their subject population, made only token efforts in 3260 to dislodge them from their fastnesses in the mountains and hill country.

THE LORD OF THE DARK (SA 3260-3310)

The Bâitha's dilatory response to the Second Revolt stemmed less from negligence than from necessity. Twelve years after Pharazôn's withdrawal from Bellakar, Tar-Palantir died and was succeeded by his daughter, Tar-Míriel. The ambitious Pharazôn, relying upon his influence among the Ârûwanâi, his popularity with the people of Númenor and, above all, the armed might of his fleet and soldiery, claimed the Sceptre and forcibly took Míriel to wife in 3255. In that same year, Sauron named himself "King of Men," this time with vaster resources and manpower to defend the claim. A great war was brewing on the horizon, and the Bâitha knew that it must prevent its military forces from becoming embroiled in the suppression of local rebels while the fate of the world lay in the balance.

It was the Dark Lord who struck the first blow, concentrating his assault upon the haven and hinterland of Umbar, Númenor's strongest foothold in Middle-earth. The Bâitha dutifully sent troops to aid their northern brethren while the king prepared his fleets. Support, however, was minimal, since the Bâitha had disarmed most of its Bellakaze auxiliaries and militia following the revolt, and feared to weaken the league army at home, lest the rebel Bellanarod exploit the situation to their advantage.

Fortunately for the Kadîr, the conflict with Sauron proved unexpectedly short-lived. In 3262 Ar-Pharazôn elicited the Dark Lord's surrender at Umbar and bore him back to Númenor as a hostage for the complaisance of his subjects and allies in Middle-earth. Within three years, however, Sauron had won the king's trust as a counselor and persuaded him to turn to the worship of Mulkhêr, Lord of the Dark, in pursuit of immortality.

The ramifications of this event for the history of Bellakar were profound. Massaging the already inflated arrogance of the Númenóreans, Sauron led the Dúnedain to regard other Men as nothing more than slaves—to be burned alive in sacrifice to Mulkhêr if they should in any way displease their masters.

Not all the Dúnedain of Bellakar embraced this belief with equal enthusiasm. Many, having lived out their lives in "the lands of swift death and little bliss," were less affected by their homeland's obsession with deathlessness—yet none were unmoved by it. Some of the more practical-minded citizens of Nîlûlôni, Hazaj Tollin and Narîk-zadan saw no point in giving further provocation to rebellion among the Bellakaranî. The fanaticism of the king, however, all but guaranteed involvement in the cult as the new road to royal favor. Currying favor with the king had, throughout Bellakar's history, proven itself the most potent ingredient in fueling rivalries among the Kadîr.

The city of Korlea, traditional stronghold of royalist support in Bellakar since the Fifteen Years War, was the first member of the league to adopt the cult as its official religion. A temple to Mulkhêr was erected in Korlea in imitation of the one that now stood in the midst of Armenelos, and through the representations of its *ad-apthubêth* (backed up by the encouragement of the king) the Bâitha declared relentless war upon the intransigent Bellanarod still holding out on the desert frontier of the league.

The Bellakaze of Nîlûlôni, Hazaj Tollin and Narîk-zadan that submitted to the Bâitha following the Second Revolt were granted protection from the cult as a matter of civic integrity—the constitutional framework of the league still provided some check against the arbitrary encroachments of Korlea—but in conformity with the king's new law his non-Dúnadan subjects were deprived of all political rights within the Bâitha. In these cities, the Bellakaze received better treatment than in southern Bellakar, and many of the Adûnâi continued to privately regard them as allies.

The other *ad-apthubêthî* approved the war vote less out of a desire to exterminate the rebels than in hopes it would occupy the belligerence of Korlea and prevent its ambitious citizens from using the cult as a pretext for eroding the authority of the other Kadîr. The campaign of subjugation that followed in 3280 might have been swiftly concluded had royal forces been sent to strengthen the league army—the king being eager to feed the fires of Mulkhêr's altar with Bellakarian blood—but Korlea begged Ar-Pharazôn to allow them space to prove their unassisted zeal for the Lord of the Dark. It was Ârûwanâ politics as usual, and the Kadîr could ill-afford to oppose this demonstration of religious fervor. Nor did they yet feel impelled to dissuade Korlea from its crusade, buying time to counter its newfound influence by other means.

Like the revolt that preceded it, this was to be a drawn-out affair of hill and mountain warfare. But the novel opportunities for

royal favor afforded by the legalization of slavery which it offered altered the character of this conflict. The goal was no longer the restoration of order, but the provocation of further fighting. The Bellanarod fought valiantly, realizing the implacable nature of the foe, and on several occasions they were victorious due to their mastery of the terrain; but ultimately they were always forced to withdraw or face utter destruction as the Bâitha's steel-clad soldiery gathered before their strongholds.

The fighting dragged on intermittently for a generation until all remaining pockets of resistance along the coasts and in the adjacent Bellakarian hill country had been annihilated. The surviving Bellanarod retreated deep into the Auz Bekar, so that the Korleans could no longer pretend to be "liberating" the league territories from "heathen aggression." The costs of the war were beginning to weigh heavily upon the Bâitha, so that eventually even the most moderate of the Kadîr were forced to participate in the wanton trafficking in plunder and human life to finance their military obligations to the Bâitha. Korlea, however, remained always at the forefront of the slaughter and the profit, until it recovered the economic supremacy it had once wielded following the War of the Renegades.

The prominence of Korlea propelled its rivals (especially Hazaj Tollin) to emulate Mulkhêr's followers. Not that the cult ever took hold publicly in any of the other cities. Certainly no temple to Mulkhêr was raised to vie with that of Korlea—the Men of Korlea would see to it that they alone enjoyed that distinction. But in this time of doubt and distrust it was inevitable that many ambitious individuals would fall prey to the promises of the Lord of the Dark. Factions arose within the Kadîr, some urging official adoption of the king's worship, others opposing its emulation, either out of genuine principle or from fear of its consequences for law and order.

But Korlea had only begun to taste power. Chafing for more glorious triumphs, the Korleans strove to provoke a war with Bozisha-Miraz. Contending that the merchant princes of the Dar dominated the caravan and sea-ways at the king's expense, the Korlean *aʒapthubêth* urged the Bâitha in 3300 to levy exorbitant tariffs on all traffic passing into Bellakar from Raj and all shipping passing out of the Bay of Tulwang through "Bellakarian waters," meaning the entire bay.

To add injury to insult, Korlea alleged that the constitution of Balkuzôr, once a Bozishnara colony and still a center for trade with Raj, unjustly discriminated against its Númenórean citizens, its government corrupted by powerful mercantile interests. They demanded that Balkuzôr be allowed to become a "true" Númenórean city, purged of its heathen degeneracy under the protection of Korlea and Mulkhêr. Such proposals were designed to elicit Bozishnara opposition—and royal approval, since they would enhance the king's revenues and encourage the worship of the Dark.

This placed the other Kadîr in a difficult position. The Korleans were playing the same card they had in the campaign against the Bellanarod, only this time the consequences of joining in—or of refusing to do so—were dangerous. To victimize local recalcitrants was one thing; to enter upon an unprovoked war against a major foreign power was not only risky, but detrimental, since the economic stability of the league depended upon commerce with the city of Bozisha-Dar.

Such a conflict could only benefit Korlea—to the peril of the other Kadîr, as Korlea's designs for hegemony over Balkuzôr clearly revealed. The only viable alternative the Kadîr had was to stall for time. The Bâitha prescinded from putting the issue to a vote, ruling instead that a delegation be sent to lay the matter before the king in Armenelos. The Bozishnarod did likewise, anxious to stymie Korlean belligerence by negotiating a peaceful settlement.

THE EMBASSY OF ZIGÛRKHIL (SA 3310-3319)

This diplomatic activity resulted in an unexpected outcome. In this year (3310) Ar-Pharazôn was on the verge of announcing his plans for the Great Armament, that mad scheme to seize the Undying Lands from the Deathless that brought about the Downfall of Númenor and the ruin of the ancient world. With so great an undertaking at hand, Korlean complaints about trade disputes and local corruption rang hollow in the king's ear. Such matters could wait until after he had won the greater prize of immortality.

As the king's counselor, Sauron, ever ready to work secret evil against the Númenóreans, persuaded Pharazôn to send a trusted representative of his interests to investigate the allegations brought against the heathen, and especially to assess the worthiness of the Men of Balkuzôr to participate in the cult at Korlea. To this the king gladly assented, hoping that the gesture would satisfy all concerned until he had leisure to resolve the situation personally. Naturally, such a response satisfied no one—the king was playing the same stalling game.

Sauron, however, had no intention of allowing the matter to diffuse itself. To ensure that it did not, he gave secret instructions to Pharazôn's envoy to escalate the conflict. This was Zigûrkhil, a fanatical devotee of Mulkhêr chosen by Sauron himself. Zigûrkhil's mission was to enflame the Korleans to embark on a crusade to convert the Kadîr to the worship of the Dark, or to treat them as heathen to be destroyed for the glory of Mulkhêr.

This mission to Bellakar was combined with a declaration of the king's intention to make war on Aman. Ar-Pharazôn commanded the Kadîr to marshal men, arms and provisions for the conflict. These forces were to be sent to Númenor by a specified date. A tithe of the total armed forces from each of the league-cities was all that Pharazôn demanded. "But," added Zigûrkhil, "those who would show their loyalty to the king will send in excess of that."

By this remark Zigûrkhil made it plain to the Bâitha that their enthusiasm for Ar-Pharazôn's plan would heavily influence the king's verdict concerning the Dar. This caused consternation among the Kadîr. They had no desire to participate in the king's mad war; even Târik an-Narduvî regarded Zigûrkhil's stance with ambivalence. Others were genuinely zealous for Pharazôn's war, knowing that disgrace would accrue to the Ârûwanâ who remained behind in so glorious a venture.

For the Korleans, Zigûrkhil's proclamation posed a dilemma. Many of them pined for an opportunity to open hostilities against their league rivals. If they failed to take action before the summons for mobilization came, the skeleton garrison that remained behind to guard Korlea would be scarcely sufficient to sustain war against the other Kadîr. Indeed, militarily it was Korlea's adversaries who would hold the upper hand if the other cities sent only the tithe of forces required by the king's decree. They might even be in a position to threaten Korlea itself.

By instilling doubt into both sides, Zigûrkhil hastened the eventuality of war within the league. Heralded by this ominous prelude, the envoy commenced his diplomatic tour of Bellakar, sounding out the disposition of each city and taking note of individuals and groups within them that might be manipulated for Sauron's purposes.

He received a cold reception in the north. In his wake, the more vigorous anti-Korlean elements within the government of Hazaj Tollin (soon followed by those of Nîlûlôni) reacted with surprising brutality, seizing anyone suspected of having given Zigûrkhil a favorable hearing and condemning them to summary execution.

While distrust and repression poisoned the unity of the northern league-cities, Zigûrkhil gloated over Korlea and its burgeoning dependencies. Inciting his co-religionists to a pitch of fanaticism, Sauron's minion oversaw bloody purges of Bozishnara supporters and anti-Mulkhêrite factions in Balkuzôr and Zimra-zadan, aligning their inhabitants with the temple at Korlea. Balkuzôr's ties to the Dar were severed and Zimra-zadan's trade was tithed by the cult, both actions far exceeding Zigûrkhil's authority.

A renewed wave of diplomatic representations by the northern Kadîr and outraged Bozishnarod appeared in Armenelos to denounce Zigûrkhil's actions, but at this point Ar-Pharazôn was sufficiently preoccupied with the Great Armament (and Zigûrkhil sufficiently persuasive in his rebuttals to his accusers) that the king took no action. In fact, Pharazôn was so caught up with eschatological fervor that he answered only with the words: "The hour is near. Put aside lesser matters and give thought to your destiny." With this grim reply ringing in their ears, the ambassadors departed.

When the unsuccessful legations returned to their cities, they were confronted with a horrible new development: the *aşapthubêth* of Korlea had vanished—abducted and murdered, so Zigûrkhil claimed, by the treasonous leaders of Hazaj Tollin and Nîlûlôni. (In actual fact, Zigûrkhil's own minions had arranged the kidnapping, and now came forth to produce the corpse along with evidence in support of the envoy's allegations.) Secret communications uncovered by his adjutants, claimed Zigûrkhil, revealed a plot by the Bâitha to assail the worshippers of Mulkhêr and incite a rebellion against the king. It was a lie—but a prophetic lie that begat swift fulfillment.

THE KORLEAN WAR (SA 3319)

Korlea now had the pretext it needed to justify the war it so greatly desired, and soon received a royal mandate to prosecute it. Ar-Pharazôn was furious at the treason of Bellakar on the very eve of his campaign and assured his loyalists that they would win no lesser glory in annihilating those who would thwart him in Middle-earth than in Aman. "Thrice, unaided by aught but their own valor, your forefathers defended the honor of Anadûnê," declared the king, recalling Korlea's deeds in the wars and revolts of the past. "Let now that boast be made fourfold, and I shall exalt your name to the stars!" The year was 3319, and Númenor's doom was at hand.

The conflict that ensued would decide the future of Bellakar. On the one side stood Korlea, Balkuzôr, Târik an-Narduvî and Zimra-zadan; on the other, Hazaj Tollin, Nîlûlôni and Ûrêzâyan. Narîk-zadan would have joined the other Kadîr had it not been attacked suddenly by Mulkhêrian forces from the neighboring haven of Dûsalan (arranged by Zigûrkhil with the cooperation of the Ârûwanâi of Umbar).

Though numerically matched, the Korlean forces overshadowed their opponents through the sorcerous powers wielded by Zigûrkhil and his minions. But new strength was brought to the ranks of the Kadîr when the Bâitha voted to restore to the Bellakaze their political rights. Large numbers of them were promptly enrolled into the league army and fleet, fearing no treachery, since native and Númenórean alike had become one in the eyes of a common foe.

Even so, the war might have gone ill for the Kadîr had not their general, Belzagar of Nîlûlôni, solicited the aid of the estranged Bozishnarod, who beat the Mulkhêrians at their own game, drawing off the enemy's strength by launching vigorous attempts to capture Zimra-zadan, Târik an-Narduvî and Balkuzôr from the sea. With their allies withdrawn, the Korlean host was compelled to decide the issue of the war in a single battle.

There, upon the Vale of Lôkhurush, Korlea and its dark god were halted, thanks to Bêlzagar's surprise deployment of a newly recruited phalanx of Bellakaze spearmen to rout the Korlean right wing. The fighting continued unabated after nightfall, the time of Mulkhêr's power. But the Bellakaze of later days said that Zigûrkhil's sorcery was confounded that night by Ladnoca the Moon, whose brilliance miraculously vanquished the Lord of the Dark. Whatever the truth of this story, dawn of the following day saw the Korlean forces in flight.

Seeking refuge behind the walls of Korlea, the fugitive host was dismayed to find their city blockaded by a combined Bellakarian-Bozishnara fleet, with soldiers of the Kadîr and of the Dar deployed in line of battle upriver from the city gates, barring any entrance. The strategy and iron confidence of Belzagar had entrapped and doomed the Korleans. Surrounded on all sides, the Mulkhêrians were mercilessly slaughtered. The remaining defenders of the citadel of Korlea, refusing surrender, prepared to fight to the last from the sanctum of their temple. But as they called upon Mulkhêr to deliver them from their foes, a great tremor rent the earth beneath their feet, and the mighty city of Korlea was felled, collapsing in ruin. It was an omen of Númenor's destruction, and though they did not know it, the world had been changed.

THE DOWNFALL OF NÚMENOR (SA 3319-3421)

Númenor's drowning heralded a cataclysm greater than that which accompanied the War of Wrath: "all the coasts and seaward regions of the western world suffered great change and ruin in that time; for the seas invaded the lands, and shores foundered, and ancient isles were drowned, and new isles were uplifted; and hills crumbled and rivers were turned into strange courses (Sil.280)." The Earth, formerly flat, had been made round.

Bellakar did not escape this disaster. The earthquake that destroyed Korlea was matched by others, equally devastating, that rent the Lôkhurush and Sîres valleys, wreaking chaos in Târik an-Narduvî, Zimra-zadan and Nîlûlôni. Hazaj Tollin, Ûrêzâyan and Balkuzôr fared no better, being swept away by massive tidal waves. Only Narîk-zadan, high atop its impregnable rock, weathered the storm. The loss of life was staggering, far greater than anything the war might have achieved. Its victors returned home only to find their wives and children dead, the works of their hands demolished, their crops and livestock obliterated. Two thousand years of civilization had been undone in a single day.

Once again, Belzagar of Nîlûlôni repaid the trust the Bâitha had put in him. Now named *aşapthubêth* of Nîlûlôni (the first Adûnâ of half-Bellakaze blood ever to hold that office), Belzagar was sent to re-establish friendship with the Dar, and to beg the Bozishnarod (less damaged by the cataclysm) to lend the Bâitha their aid in rebuilding Bellakar. The lords of the Katedrala graciously received Belzagar's embassy and promised to do whatever was within their power to help, provided that the territory of Korlea was dismantled and exiles were restored to Balkuzôr and Zimra-zadan.

In the weeks that followed, the Kadîr were too consumed with their own griefs to give heed to aught else, but eventually the ominous silence of the Sea began to trouble their hearts. What did it mean? Reports reached them from Umbar and Khâradûnê of

similar devastation, and there too no ship of Númenor had been seen upon the waves for many a moon.

In spring of the following year, emissaries appeared along the coasts—emissaries whose banners bore a new device, a white crown under seven stars. They had come from Pelargir, Haven of the Faithful, far to the north, and from these the Bellakaranî received tidings: Númenor had fallen and Ar-Pharazôn had perished; but the Lords of Andúnië—Elendil and his sons—having escaped death by the grace of the Valar, were now ordering realms in the Westlands, and received lordship over the Faithful in Middle-earth.

This news called forth at once sorrow, joy and wonder from its hearers. Fear, at last, of the mad tyrant was banished, and hope was born that the Kadîr might recover the peace they once knew. But for the Adûnâi this hope had come at a terrible price: the loss of their homeland. Not that many of them had ever lived in Númenor—most had never even seen it—but the idea of Númenor as the wellspring of their culture and the glory of their race was deep-seated. Bereft of it, they now faced the challenge of refashioning not only their lives, but their whole identity as a people.

This sense of aporia was further rankled by Elendil's presumption of leadership over those who had resisted the King's Men. Although the ways of the Ârûwanâi had profoundly affected the language and culture of Bellakar, the majority of its colonists had parted company with the excesses of the later kings, especially the policies of Ar-Pharazôn. The concerns of the Faithful—the "Elf-friends" led by the Lords of Andúnië—lay distant from the hearts of the Dúnedain of Bellakar. Nevertheless, the Bellakaranî respected the Valar and worshipped Eru, and that allegiance they had never betrayed. By what right, therefore, did Elendil claim precedence over them?

The Adûnâi of Bellakar too remembered the legends of their race's ancient friendship with the Eldar, in recognition of which their forefathers had received the gift of Númenor; but like the Valar, the Eldar were far from Bellakar. None in living memory had ever beheld the High Elves or held converse with them. The Eldar might be envied for their immortality, but ultimately their existence did not affect the Bellakaranî, so there was no point in denying their ancestral tongue in favor of Sindarin. They were proud of their Adûnaic heritage.

To the Kadîr, therefore, the proclamation of Elendil and his sons sounded arrogant, simply assuming that all but those who accepted their authority were "Black Númenóreans." Indignant at this, the *aʁapthubêthî* of the Bâitha, led by Belzagar, recounted their deeds against the Mulkhêrians, calling to witness all they had suffered under Ar-Pharazôn and his Korlean vassals. Then, having shown the ambassadors the devastation of their realm, the *aʁapthubêthî* entreated them to deliver their reply to the Lords of Andúnië.

The successful career of Belzagar spurred many of the Bellakaze to seek a more prominent role within the traditionally Númenórean-dominated Bâitha. This pressure generated new social tensions within the Kadîr. While ready to reward Bellakaze valor in the overthrow of Korlea and its allies, the Adûnâi remained jealously protective of their preeminence—especially in the wake of Númenor's downfall.

But concessions had to be made. Pure-blooded Adûnâi were now decisively in the minority, and could not afford to risk poisoning relations with the urban and rural masses on whom the survival of the league now depended. But many of those claiming to be Adûnâi now possessed a fair amount of Bellakaze blood. The solution adopted in Hazaj Tollin, Narîk-zadan and Ûrêzâyan was to allow Bellakaze to hold any office (including that of *aʁapthubêth*) in the elective league government, while reserving actual lordship over the individual cities and their militias for a select number of Númenórean families. Definitions of what qualified one as an "Adûnâ" varied according to city.

The most exclusive definition was upheld by the newly-constituted citizenry of rebuilt Korlea. Though the original city's inhabitants had been virtually extinguished by the cataclysm, the rich territory of Korlea was coveted by Adûnâi throughout the Kadîr whose former possessions had been ruined. Founded in 3321, the new city was primarily peopled by citizens of Númenórean heritage from throughout the league. Perhaps ironically, the city that the Kadîr had struggled to divest of the arrogance of fallen Númenor had now reappeared, colonized by Adûnâi who were by no means immune to such tendencies.

The Adûnaic aristocracy of Balkuzôr and Zimra-zadan, on the other hand, were not in a position to make such demands, and instead followed the lead of Nîlûlôni. This lack of uniformity within the league, particularly in the matter of military organization, was to put the Bâitha at a disadvantage in events on the horizon that would mark the end of the Second Age: the War of the Last Alliance.

THE LAST ALLIANCE (SA 3421-3441)

The Gondorian emissaries who brought news to Bellakar in 3320 believed that Sauron had perished along with Númenor, since it was reported that he had been in Armenelos at the time of the cataclysm. And the years of peace that followed seemed to vindicate this belief. Tragically, of course, this was not the case. Being a Maia, Sauron could not be utterly banished from the world or prevented from assuming a new body. After a century of secret convalescence in Mordor, the Dark Lord sought to reactivate the allegiance of the Ârûwanâi for a great war against the Elendili and their Elven allies.

The rebuilding of harbors and shipyards in the century after the Downfall allowed the Kadîr to open tenuous communications with most of the former Númenórean colonies along the coasts of Endor. However, they first received clear evidence of Sauron's plans from the Aukuag peoples dwelling along the caravan routes of Bozisha-Miraz. Among the tribes of the interior wastes, there was word of the recent rise to power among the Haruze of the Dúnadan renegades Fuinur and Herumor.

Sauron had promised these two exiles the lordship of Gondor in exchange for their fealty, and urged them to galvanize support in the Southlands. Envoys from the brothers came to Bellakar in 3421, appealing chiefly to those Adûnaic nobles who felt that their supremacy over the Bellakaze was waning. The brothers promised to restore Bellakar's greatness if it would ally its forces with the Lord of Mordor.

But the Bellakaranî were well-versed in the lies of the Enemy, and the Bâitha utterly rejected the brothers' advances. The envoys bowed coldly upon receiving so unequivocal a rebuttal, and said only: "So be it. Our lords shall not forget it. Pray that the day of their victory never comes, for it shall go ill with you." But far from casting a shadow of doubt on their hearts, these words succeeded only in closing the ranks of Adûnaic and Bellakaze opposition. Even so, the prediction of the envoys—that Bellakar should suffer if the Dark Lord's war failed of its purpose—was to prove true, though not by the means he had imagined.

As the plans of the Dark Lord and his renegade allies became clear, the Bâitha debated whether they should remain neutral in this conflict or cast in their lot with the alliance being formed against Sauron, mostly realms in the distant and little-known north of Endor. The situation was complicated by the influence of the other Númenórean states of western and southern Middle-earth.

In the north, the old Númenórean colony of Cardolan was now a province of Elendil's kingdom of Arnor, while all of the Pelar-

girean league-towns were loyal to his sons, Isildur and Anárion, as part of the kingdom of Gondor. With its northern border province of Zâyan an-Khârurush now mostly populated by Haruze loyal to Fuinur and Herumor, Umbar was overwhelmingly hostile to the Elendili, seeing them as a direct threat to their sovereignty. Its ships and soldiers would stand by the side of the Dark Lord. As Bellakar's largest trading partner after the Dar, Umbar's wishes were of no little consequence to the Bellakarian cities. The future relations of the two realms would depend on the outcome of this distant struggle in northern lands.

To the south, Númenóreans in Tulwang and the Thânî Hazad (the Seven Dominions of northern and southern Pel, the Urîd Pharazânî, Drel, northern and southern Zimrathâni, and Elorna) offered naval support to Sauron, while Anbalukkhôr, one-time stronghold of the renegade Herundil, would serve as a staging area for arms and armies from all across southern Endor. As the time of the conflict drew near, privateers from the Thânî Hazad, Mûmakan and the Dar swept Gondorian shipping from the coasts. Fleets of warships and merchantmen began moving north; Bellakar, to keep its sea-lanes open, dared not interfere with them. Instead, for a time, the Bâitha stood aloof from the conflict and ordered the cities to look to their defense by building and arming their own ships.

Words of anger and rage flowed around the chambers of the Bâitha, all over policies that many saw as hypocritical, if not cowardly. The cities of Bellakar in which Adûnâi still held sway wanted to send ships and troops to aid the Elendili and their allies, while those where the Bellakaze were becoming politically dominant preferred to stay their hand and wait on events. At the last hour, after the great war had already begun in the North, the Bâitha held a debate in which many recalled the courage of Belzagar against the Mulkhêrians. What would Belzagar's generation have done in this year of crisis and war? Finally, and secretly, the Bâitha decided to aid the enemies of Sauron, now gathering in the north under that great and grim title: the Last Alliance of Elves and Men.

In 3429 the league dispatched a fleet and army under the command of Zagarthôr, *asapthubêth* of Nîlûlôni and descendant of Belzagar, to the aid of Gondor. No hope remained of using harbors or roads in Umbar and Haruzan, and the sorcery of the Dark Lord seemed to have closed all other paths north. Zagarthôr, however, was a worthy successor to the great sea-captains of Númenor. He took his ships north and westward across the deeps of the sea, until men said that he was looking for the tower of Meneltarma to take counsel with the ghost of Tar-Aldarion. Then he drove east on the brow of a fierce-blowing gale, riding into the Bay of Belfalas ahead of the storm and slipping past dangerous shoals and Umbarean warships at night, using an old Bellakaze smuggler as pilot.

Zagarthôr's fleet made harbor in a small port of Lebennin, just short of the mouths of the mighty River Anduin, while Sauron's pursuing blockade squadrons fought the wind to hold themselves off the muddy shoals of the Anduin delta. Seven days of swift movement brought Zagarthôr's army to Pelargir itself, fifty leagues upriver. Few knew of his approach, for he came near to outmarching the heralds of Gondor hurrying to bring word to Anárion the king. Pelargir, then the greatest of Gondor's cities, was besieged on land and water by the hosts of the Nazgûl Adûnaphel and the armies of the brothers Fuinur and Herumor.

Sauron's mists and darkness shrouded the battlefield, masking the approach of the Bellakarian host. All who saw them appearing out of the gloom marveled, for they bore banners and armor of old Númenor, heirlooms of their vanished ancestors, and a light shown around these that sorcery could not tarnish. Many thought that an army of ghosts had come out of the ancient West to the aid of its embattled heirs.

Zagarthôr and Anárion had wisdom enough to make use of their advantage. Without pause for rest or provision, Zagarthôr's host fell upon the flank of Adûnaphel's forces on the west bank of the Anduin, which had crossed the river in war-galleys. The Bellakaranî struck the weakest part of Herumor's lines, broke them, and drove thousands of Haruze and Variags before them to drown in the river. Zagarthôr then led his men in storming the defended ships of Umbar moored on the Anduin's banks. The burning and capture of these ships ended the immediate threat to Pelargir and Adûnaphel's forces never again mounted so serious a threat to the city.

The siege of Gondor was finally lifted by the coming of Elendil's forces from the North. In 3430, fleets from Arnor and Elvish Lindon sank and scattered the ships blockading Gondor's coasts. Zagarthôr was able to tell the Bâitha of his victory. The ships of Bellakar convoyed cavalrymen and horses north to aid in Anárion and Isildur's defense of their Anduin frontier.

In 3434 Elendil and Gil-galad marched south with the main army of the Last Alliance of Elves and Men, striking at Mordor out of Rhovanion and east of the Anduin. Fuinur and Adûnaphel hastily withdrew most of their armies in front of Pelargir and marched them north through Ithilien to block the Alliance's advance towards Cirith Gorgor. Anárion's counterstroke across the river was led by Zagarthôr's horse and archers, with Elvish scouts leading the Bellakaze through the forests of Ithilien and knights of the Bâitha striking a savage blow on an enemy caught in line of march. The survivors of Adûnaphel's armies were driven into Gorgoroth; the forces of Gondor and its allies moved north to the decisive battlefield in front of the northern gates of Mordor, soon to be known to history as Dagorlad, the Battle Plain.

Marveling at the unexpected assistance the Bellakaze had rendered at Pelargir and the long war along the Anduin, Elendil received them as friends. Then, to Elendil's greater surprise, Zagarthôr asked to be placed under his command in the coming battle. Pleased at the humility of such a powerful ally, Elendil quickly accepted his offer. But Zagarthôr said: "Lord of Andúnië, by this proof you shall know that not all Adûnâi of the Southlands have fallen under the Shadow. But know this too, Captain of the Faithful: as we have come freely to aid you, freely shall we return to our lands. You are lord of the Elendili, not of Bellakar."

Elendil graciously accepted this correction of his envoys' presumptuousness, addressing Zagarthôr of Nîlûlôni in the hearing of all the allies as *Macilion of Silmalondë*, signifying by the use of Quenya that the Bellakaranî were to be treated as Faithful, not descendants of the King's Men. "Far be it from me to repay proven friends with a tyranny more befitting the works of Ar-Pharazôn," the king said. "Let it be as you have said. But we did not know, cast upon the shores of this Middle-earth, that there were others who held true to the allegiance of our forefathers. Therefore we rejoice in your trust, and lay no claim of lordship upon the men of Bellakar, but only over those of the Westlands who have chosen to submit themselves to our authority."

Then Elendil removed from his finger a ring and set it in Zagarthôr's hand, saying: "For the aid you have rendered for the sake of the West, now and in battles to come, receive this token of our thanks. And if a day should come when the brood of Black Númenor rises again to trouble your people, your descendants shall show this ring to mine and say: 'Macilion of Silmalondë bids you repay the debt of Elendil.' Then they shall bleed for you as you have bled for us." Zagarthôr clasped the ring tightly within his fist, nodding assent to Elendil's words.

The field of Dagorlad and the siege of Barad-dûr that followed it claimed many lives, including Zagarthôr, who fell at Elendil's side upon the slopes of Orodruin. At the conclusion of the war, the Bellakarian army was much reduced. The Dark Lord was

vanquished and the Second Age had come to an end. The survivors only wanted to return home, but on their arrival they would discover that the war had not yet ended. Bellakar was now threatened by erstwhile allies of Mordor who had fled defeat in the North, seeking easier prey.

THE FIRST TEDJIN INVASION (TA 1-340)

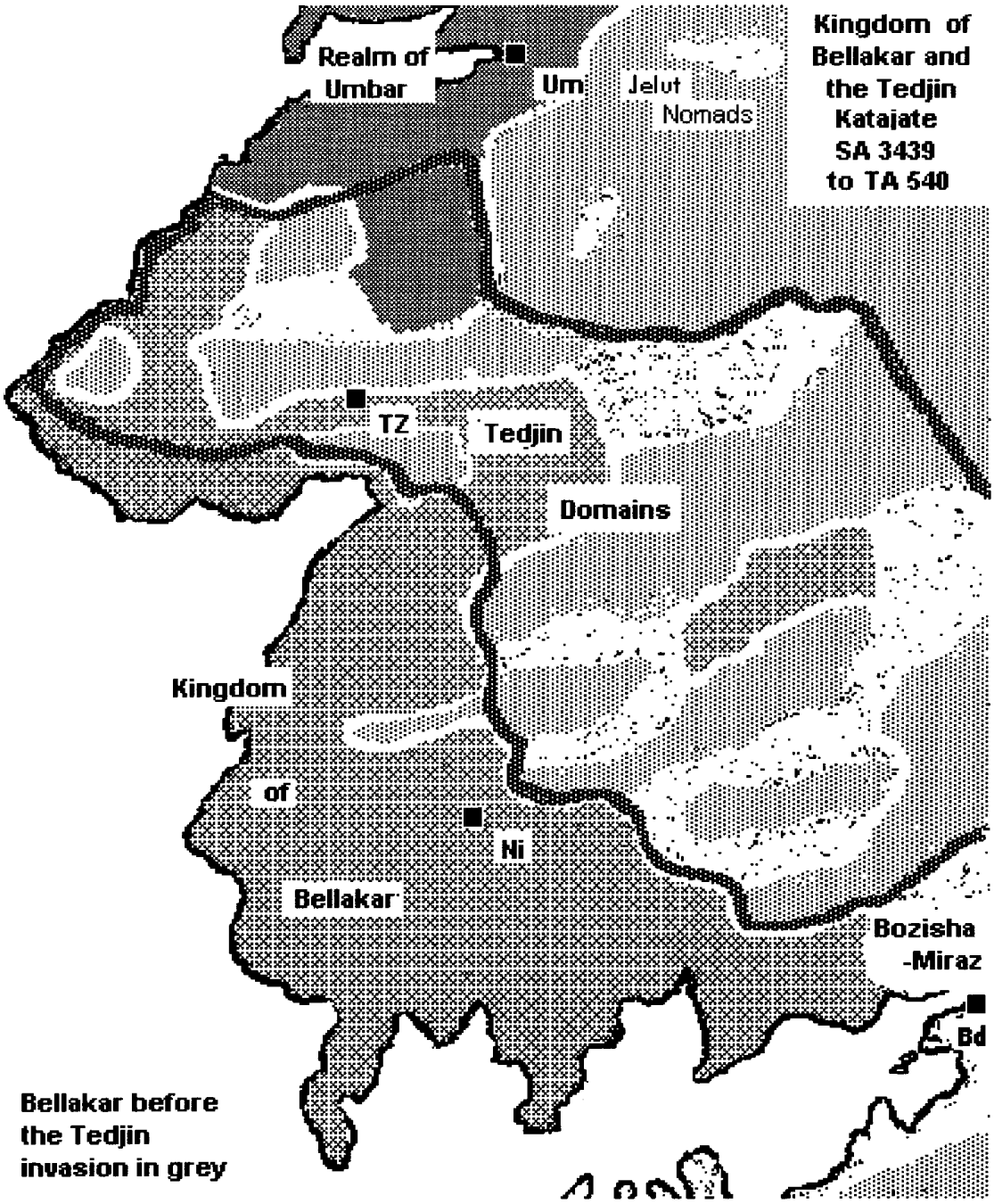
The new threat to Bellakar were the Tedjin, an Easterling people numbered among Sauron's forces whose name meant "Valorous in Battle." Originating in the Kykurian steppe of central Endor in centuries past, the Tedjin had been defeated and subjugated by the Variags of Khand. Since then they had occupied the strongholds of Lurmsakûn in Haradwaith as Variag vassals. But seeing the defeat of their masters on the field of Dagorlad, the Tedjin began to doubt their allegiance. As the last of Ûvatha's soldiers were being fed into the charnel house of the siege of Barad-dûr, the surviving Tedjin made a break for freedom, setting off from Lurmsakûn south across the Dune Sea (the only path now open to them) in search of arable lands.

The Tedjin horde struck Raj first, conquering a third of Bozisha-Miraz by surprise. However, a few months later they were repulsed by the Bozishnarod. Rather than accept a new yoke of slavery, the Tedjin made alliance with their old enemies, the nomads of Haradwaith. They struck westwards, traversing the Dune Sea into northern Bellakar. There they overran the oases of the Hulja Mountains and the Bellakaze towns dispersed across the northern slopes of the highlands of Mardruak, reaching the sea by seizing the mercantile town of Dûsalan on the coastal frontier between Bellakar and Umbar. But their greatest success was the capture of Khibil Êphalak, the prosperous and strategic caravan town lying on the edge of the Dune Sea on the southern side of the Auz Bekar.

The sack of Khibil Êphalak was the first confrontation of Bellakaranî against Tedjin, as the oasis it guarded was tributary to Nîlûlôni and the center of Bellakar's desert trade. The invaders plundered and burnt the city with uncommon savagery, but despite this, the Tedjin met little resistance (except from Nîlûlôni), since the greater part of the league army was far away, still fighting Sauron in Mordor.

The Tedjin made Khibil Êphalak one of their chief fortresses and went on to carve out a territory spanning the length of Bellakar, cutting off all land routes to Umbar and Haruzan as far as Dûsalan. The newcomers built several fortified towns, the greatest of which was Thri Zirakan, the seat of their *kataj* or high chieftain. Tedjin relations with Umbar were icy; with Bellakar they were execrable. Plunder and rapine became the daily Tedjin fare.

The return of what was left of the battle-hardened league army seven years later quickened the spirit of Bellakar's defenders, but even with its help the Bellakaranî were unable to dislodge the



Tedjin from their desert fastnesses or their new strongholds. Narîk-zadan was lost to Bellakar completely, to emerge as a center of Tedjin culture and power in later years. For decades and centuries the Kadîr would suffer repeated attacks by Tedjin raiders, and on two occasions major (and, fortunately for the Bellakaze, unsuccessful) offensives were launched against Nîlûlôni in attempts by ambitious *katajan* to seize control of the coastal caravan routes.

The depredations of the Tedjin, combined with the loss of nearly half the league army in the Last Alliance, reversed all the gains of the first century after the Downfall. It was as if Númenor had fallen again, only now with little hope for rebuilding the fortunes of its colonies. As decades and generations passed, the Bâitha became less and less effective, due to its shrinking resources and manpower; the Kadîr turned inward, looking to their individual survival in a harsh world. After four centuries of decline, many of the Bellakaranî regarded the league as a failure, and began searching for a new source of order.

THE END OF THE LEAGUE (TA 340)

Throughout this time of troubles, Nîlûlôni remained relatively stable and prosperous. Having twice repulsed Tedjin efforts to dominate traffic along the Batân an-Sakal, its commercial and political ties with the Dar assured it preeminence among the Kadîr. Its wealth enabled it to hire a sizable mercenary army (mostly composed of Bellanarod, Aukuag and Bozishnarod) to supplement its urban levy, and often it would come to the military assistance of neighboring cities without consulting the Bâitha, thus enhancing its individual prestige to the detriment of the increasingly ineffectual league.

Power was further consolidated through hereditary control of the city's government by the descendants of Belzagar and Zagarthôr, whose heroism in the Korlean war and Last Alliance recommended their house to Bellakaze, Bellanar, Bozishnar and Adûnâ alike. With the decline of Dúnadan bloodlines and the increasing importance of ties with Raj, the "native" element in the makeup of the Tumakveh (the ancient name of the clan through which the lords of Nîlûlôni traced their Bellakaze descent) achieved greater prominence, though they never downplayed their Adûnaic heritage. The entrenchment of this family's influence over Bellakarian affairs, combined with the weakening of the Bâitha, eventually tempted one of the Tumakveh to make a bid for monarchic power.

In 340, fifteen years after the second failed attempt by the Tedjin to take Nîlûlôni, Zimrêbal Ironhand, the lord of that city, summoned an emergency session of the Bâitha. Recent engagements against the Tedjin by league forces had resulted in a series of ignominious Bellakarian defeats, and rumors of Tedjin preparations for another major assault on the Kadîr were running like wildfire along the Batân an-Sakal.

Effective resistance could only be mounted, Zimrêbal contended, if the defense of the country were placed under the command of a general with dictatorial powers to coordinate the disorganized league forces with the urban militias. Limitations on the duration and scope of this general's command would only play into the hands of the enemy. Victory over the Tedjin could only be assured by investiture of the officeholder with unlimited authority. Once the invaders had been decisively vanquished and the affairs of the Kadîr set in order, the general would lay down his powers and restore them to the Bâitha.

So Zimrêbal urged. Given the number of his personal supporters in the Bâitha (both genuine and "bought"), it was no surprise that his resolution was adopted, and it was all but a foregone conclusion that Zimrêbal himself would be elected to perform the office. Zimrêbal fulfilled his new role admirably: Bellakarian forces were reorganized into an effective fighting machine, the Tedjin were driven back, peace and prosperity were restored to the cities. Yet all was done in such a way that the preservation of law and order now depended upon the personal influence and resources of Zimrêbal.

In the end, Zimrêbal never did restore power to the Bâitha, maintaining that the crisis which he had been appointed to redress had not yet ended. In order to normalize this state of affairs, Zimrêbal felt he must legitimize himself by a higher authority. His solution was to transform the religious traditions of the Bellakaranî so that they would undergird the monarchic rule of the Tumakveh clan.

Bozishnara cults had been prevalent among the Bellakaze from early times, in particular those of Ladnoca the Moon and of Najm, Lord of the Sea. In fact, Zimrêbal's own city of Nîlûlôni (Ad. "Haven of the Moon") marked the traditional site of Ladnoca's birth and so had been an important pilgrimage destination from time immemorial. Zimrêbal intended to exploit this religious dimension to its fullest in his attempt to forge a more enduring unity among the Bellakaze and Adûnaic halves of his nascent kingdom.

One of Zimrêbal's first acts was to change the name of his capital to *Nîlûlondê*, a blending of its Adûnaic name with Quenya *Silmalondë*, thus recalling Elendil's honoring of Zagarthôr in the Last Alliance. By this subtle modification of the traditional usage, Zimrêbal yoked the Southron religious associations of the site with the tale of how the progenitor of the Elendili acknowledged Bellakar as a realm of the Faithful, preservers of authentic Dúnadan tradition.

Another concession to native tradition was to apply Bellakaze month names to the calendrical system of the King's Reckoning. This enabled Bellakarian religious festivals to coincide with the cycle and rhythm of the Númenórean year. It also served as a symbolic gesture of the Tumakveh's respect for the Bozishnara pantheon.

THE TUMAKVEH CALENDAR

SINDARIN	BELLAKAZE
Narwain	Dahlat
N nui	Najam
Gwaeron	Manjaz
Gwirith	Vetrashu
Lothron	Ishat
N rui	Vatrul
Cerveth	Mizir
Urui	Kuralid
Ivanneth	Darat
Narbeleth	Tamum
Hithui	Sumat
Girithron	Oluj

But Zimrêbal's boldest religious innovation was to integrate Ladnoca into the monotheistic worship of Eru, thus setting indigenous *cultus* on a par with the Númenórean. The observance of Númenórean religion had always been dependent upon the existence of a rightful monarch, since it was believed that only the king could perform the priestly role of mediating between the people and the One. Because the line of Elros had always dwelt in Númenor in the shadow of the Meneltarma, the sole legitimate place of worship, the spiritual life of the colonists in Middle-earth had been confined mainly to observing the holy days of the liturgical calendar.

Zimrêbal greatly expanded this conservative order of worship by emulating the tradition established in the Westlands by Elendil and his sons. Just as the Elendili had named a new hallow upon Mount Mindolluin, so too Zimrêbal chose an eminence near to his capital of Nîlûlondê, which he named Izindutârik, the Pillar of Truth, as a fane for the worship of Eru, ascending it on the holy days to offer prayer. It was at the time of the summer equinox that Eru and Ladnoca were invoked together in thanksgiving for the first-fruits.

Zimrêbal dubbed this syncretistic brand of Eru-worship the Kâthasaptha, an Adûnaic approximation of "Infinite Wisdom," the classical Bozishnara concept of cosmic order. Under Tumakveh auspices, "Kâthasaptha" came to be used as an epithet of Eru. But it never became a circumlocution for the Divine Name. Unlike the Faithful of the Westlands, the Tumakveh were not so guarded with their evocation of the One; indeed, Êru would become a frequent element in Tumakveh names (e.g., Êruzagar "Sword of God," Êruhil "Follower of God," Êruzîr "Friend of God," Êruzôr "Obedient to God").

But the critical nexus of cult and monarchy was encapsulated in Ûrê'n Avalê, the Day of Revival, which Zimrêbal added to the traditional cycle of festivals. This new holy day commemorated a dream visitation by Ladnoca to Zimrêbal, wherein the goddess instructed him concerning a restoration of the ancient Númenórean worship to be presided over by him and his descendants. Ladnoca had made Zimrêbal king of Bellakar. Who was he to resist the command of the goddess?

THE REIGN OF ZIMRÊBAL (TA 340-395)

The Bâitha'n-Kadîr continued to exist in name, but its powers were curtailed (just as they had been under Tar-Ciryatan) and its freedom subordinated to the will of the Tumakveh dynasty. But although Zimrêbal had successfully established a kingdom, he and his successors would now have to struggle to maintain it. In 360 and 375 respectively, Zimrêbal liberated Hazaj Tollin and Narîk-zadan from Tedjin rule in a series of dramatic military engagements followed by shrewd negotiations with the kataj. Some Tedjin towns remained, others were razed; but Zimrêbal failed to dislodge the Easterlings from their capital of Thri Zirakan, so that it continued to menace the realm.

A more serious threat to the integrity of Zimrêbal's achievements came not from the barbarian invader but from his own people. Though it did not please everyone, the syncretism of the Kâthasaptha was a compromise most Bellakaranî could live with. In time, however, the cult's permutations of traditional religion led to disruptive consequences.

Over the years, the ritual association of Ladnoca with Eru at the Festival of First-fruits stimulated an elevation of the moon goddess within popular Bellakaze piety as well as among sophisticated Bozishnara philosophers. Invoked alongside the "One" of the Adûnâi, Ladnoca, already identified by the Bozishnarod as the giver and preserver of their land, began to acquire the universalistic role of creatrix, the divine source of life itself. Ladnoca was absorbing the attributes of Eru.

For a long time this phenomenon was uncomfortably tolerated by those Bellakaranî who more consciously identified themselves with their Adûnaic heritage. They wrote it off as a spontaneous and misguided, but ultimately harmless, expression of heathen error. One could hardly expect "Lesser Men" to comprehend theological distinctions between the unbegotten power of the Creator and the derivative angelic "Powers" of the world (Ladnoca usually being interpreted as a confused attempt to personify the attributes of Varda and Yavanna, misapplied to a trans-gendered Tilion).

In 390, however, the asapthubêth of Zimra-zadan, himself a leading proponent of the movement, pressed the king for official recognition of Ladnoca's equality with Eru. The motion precipitated an uproar within the Bâitha, the Adûnaic traditionalists offended by what they regarded as outright blasphemy, the Ladnocans incensed at the implied slight to their goddess and to their culture in general. Debate soon broke down into mutual anathematizing and zealous threats. The Bâitha disbanded, each faction publicizing the event in the most incendiary of terms.

The king, faced with the prospect of religiously-inspired violence, issued a swift and decisive decree to diffuse the crisis. Once again showing his genius for effecting social harmony through religious innovation, Zimrêbal reported a new dream-oracle which the goddess had conferred upon him. Desirous that the Bellakaranî should live at peace with one another, Ladnoca commanded her devotees to abstain from altering the order of worship which she had instituted through the Tumakveh. However, not wishing to dissuade the promptings of their devotion to her, the goddess bade them bestow these honors instead upon her twin sister, Ishtra. For Ishtra, she revealed, was the source of her creative power, and so it was fitting that Ladnoca be venerated through her.

As yet, Ishtra, the Bozishnara goddess of love, had no cult center in Bellakar. To rectify this situation, and to keep her separate from the Eru-Ladnoca worship, Zimrêbal declared the goddess' will: a shrine to Ishtra should be established at Zimra-zadan, because of the piety of its citizens and because it lay upon the banks of the Sîres, the same river that gave life to the oasis of Nîlûlondê. In token of this honor, Zimra-zadan would change its name to Esmer, the Bozishnara name for the morning star (with which Ishtra was identified).

This solution satisfied the majority. It provided an acceptable focus for Bellakaze, Bellanara and neighboring Bozishnara piety, while at the same time removing a source of contention from the Kâthasaptha. Nevertheless, the king took great care to placate his Adûnaic subjects by banning Ishtra's worship in the other cities of his realm (though, naturally, he did not phrase it in those terms; instead, he reported Ladnoca's pronouncement that Esmer alone was worthy of the honor—Zimrêbal was playing the old Númenórean game of holding the cities in check by competition for prestige).

THE TUMAKVEH SUCCESSION (TA 395-540)

Zimrêbal passed the remaining years of his reign in peace. Upon his death in 395, his son Abâruzôr ascended the throne only to be confronted with rebellion. Dâiruzôr, lord of Korlea, had taken advantage of the king's death to call for the end of Tumakveh monarchy and a restoration of the Bâitha to power. The rebels were concentrated mostly among the Adûnaic traditionalists of Korlea, Balkuzôr and Ûrêzâyan, who longed for a return to the old days of the league, and who were displeased with the pollution of their religion by "heathen superstition," represented principally by the royal favor now shown to neighboring Esmer.

Hazaj Tollin and Narîk-zadan, on the other hand, firmly supported the new king, and combined with the army of Esmer and its Bozishnara allies, Abâruzôr defeated Dâiruzôr in battle after only two campaigning seasons. Dâiruzôr was executed for treason, but Korlea itself was magnanimously allowed to retain its asapthubêth. Abâruzôr was anxious to undercut any further grounds for revolt.

Following the resolution of Dâiruzôr's revolt, Abâruzôr reigned for the most part in peace. No serious attempt to restore the freedom of the old league would again arise to challenge the Tumakveh. Only one mishap marred his forty-eight year rule. In 405, a Tedjin assassination attempt on him was revealed and thwarted, a

portentous reminder that their barbaric neighbors were not yet subdued.

Still, the resurgence of the Tedjin was a long time in coming. When Abâruzôr died in 443, passing on the throne to his son, Belphazân, most Bellakaranî had forgotten about the incident, their minds focused more on lingering fears of another Korlean insurrection (which proved groundless). It was not until 515, after the reign of Belphazân's son Imruzîr had seen nearly three decades of peace, that a "time of troubles" returned to Bellakar.

In that year, Batou Jochë, *kataj* of the Tedjin, captured and razed Nîlûlondê in a surprise attack, forcing Imruzîr and his subjects to flee for their lives. Finding his realm on the verge of collapse under a massive two-pronged Tedjin invasion, the aging but still vigorous king quickly prepared for the defense of Bellakar, naming Hazaj Tollin and Korlea his northern and southern wartime capitals. In the meantime, Batou Jochë captured much of northern Bellakar.

The Bellakaranî countered the barbarian advance swifter than the *kataj* anticipated, being well-served by Tumakveh reorganization of the old league forces. But the Tedjin too had become a more efficient war-host through their experience of the past five centuries in Bellakar, and were not so easily repulsed. It took Imruzîr ten years of hard fighting to turn the tables. Only in 525 could the reconquest of the north begin, and even then the Tedjin resistance was resolute, drawing out the conflict for yet another decade.

In 533, the Tedjin cause received a morale boost when Prince Zadunzîr, Imruzîr's heir, died in battle with their *kataj*. Once again, however, the Tumakveh showed their quality in adversity. In that same year, Urdubâr, the stripling grandson of Imruzîr, took up the rule of his father and command of the Bellakarian host. Born into an age of war, supposedly on the back of a horse as his mother fled the flames of Nîlûlondê, Urdubâr had grown up at his father's side on the battlefield, and his brilliance as a captain of men was soon to be unquestioned.

At the time of Imruzîr's death, only the Tedjin capital of Thri Zirakan continued to vehemently resist the authority of the Tumakveh, its inhabitants refusing any negotiation or compromise, preferring honorable death to a life of cowardice. After five years of desperate defense, Urdubâr and the Bellakarian army laid siege to the town. An extremely difficult siege followed, aggressiveness and the will to fight unwavering in either camp. Even had they been given an opportunity to escape the capture of their city, it is probable that Tedjin honor or love of battle would have dictated that they fight until death.

After six long, bloody months, on the 22nd day of Darat in 540, Batou Jochë was slain and Thri Zirakan fell into the hands of the Bellakaranî, who plundered and massacred its Tedjin inhabitants, allowing only a small number to survive as bondsmen to the king. Thri Zirakan thereafter became a stronghold of the Tumakveh and was renamed Zimrênzil in commemoration of the day of victory, which was incorporated into the royal calendar as a feast day. So ended the Tedjin threat.

THE GOLDEN AGE (TA 540-748)

Having weathered insurrection from within and invasion from without, Tumakveh rule was no longer challenged. In commemoration of his heroic achievements, Urdubâr added to his name the title of Arud Tumakveh, which signifies "Tumakveh the Victor" in the tongue of the Bellakaze, and in 543 rebuilt and fortified Nîlûlondê as the capital of his realm. In that same year he also resettled the oasis of Khibil Êphalak with veterans of the war, signaling to eager Bozishnara merchants that the caravan routes across the Dune Sea would once again be made safe. A new age of Bellakarian prosperity was about to begin.

But Urdubâr's ambitions went well beyond his royal predecessors' efforts to restore domestic order. The new Tumakveh king desired to elevate Bellakarian prestige among the survivors of Númenor: Anbalukkhôr, Khâradûnê, Zimrathâni, Umbar and, most importantly, the Pelargirean league.

Since the defeat of Sauron in the War of the Last Alliance, the power of the Ârûwanâi along the western coastlands had fallen into decline, their bloodlines swiftly dwindling or becoming merged with the Men of Middle-earth. This development held out the prospect (or so Urdubâr hoped) of breaking down old enmities and building new ties of friendship and interstate cooperation. Confident that the descendants of the Ârûwanâi would acknowledge the sins of their forefathers and abandon whatever vestiges still remained of Mulkhêrite ways, Urdubâr believed they would share the Tumakveh vision of a restoration of "authentic" Númenórean tradition coupled with a harmonious embrace of native cult and custom. Bellakarian experience would become the model for survival and prosperity in a changed world, and Urdubâr would reap the glory and gratitude attendant upon it.

Urdubâr's exuberant optimism met with some success. Bellakar controlled the gateway to the Bay of Tulwang, the central avenue of trade between Bozisha-Miraz and realms further south. Friendship with the Tumakveh, committed as they were to the preservation of Adûnaic culture, would bolster the flagging economic and political fortunes of the surviving Ârûwanâ aristocracies.

Tumakveh overtures to Umbar had less dramatic impact. Though suffering from Tedjin disruption of inland trade, Umbar remained the strongest haven of the King's Men in Middle-earth and had powerful allies among the Haruze. Like Bellakar, Umbar had been wracked by civil war at the time of Númenor's Downfall, resulting in the defeat of Mulkhêrite extremists and the destruction of their temple; unlike the Bellakaranî, the underlying ideology and arrogance of the Ârûwanâi continued to be the dominant element of Umbarean society even after the Last Alliance, and anything smacking of Elendilian attitudes was regarded by them with suspicion and hostility. Relations with the Tumakveh therefore remained cool, and were confined to limited agreements to maintain the caravan routes.

Urdubâr's most successful diplomatic adventure was realized by the visit of his grandson, Prince Êruzôr, to Gondor, particularly to the Gondorian cities of the old Pelargirean league that dotted the northern coastline of Belfalas Bay: Annúlond, Lond Galen, Dol Amroth, Methir and Pelargir itself. The ships and merchants of these cities had sailed to Bellakar, told tales of Zagarthôr's daring voyage to Gondor in the War of the Last Alliance, and the Gondorians welcomed Bellakar's mariners as friends.

Although their language and customs differed, the Faithful shared much in common with the Men of Bellakar. Both looked to the distant past of Númenor for their moral inspiration, to kings and rulers wise and honorable in deed as well as in word. The Bellakaranî had accommodated themselves to the hegemony of kings as had the Gondorians to the rule of the Line of Anárion. A preeminent ground for mutual understanding was the fact that both lived under the rule of law, rather than the fiat of tyrants or corrupt oligarchies. Both stood, at least in principle, for peaceful travel, commerce and free use of the sea-lanes of western Endor. If the Gondorians were overly proud of their Dúnadan bloodlines, if the Bellakaranî denied the Bellanara peasantry a say in the rule of their realm, at least both lived in societies without slaves or serfs, where Men could walk the streets unarmed and all could speak good or ill of their day and their station in life.

The only unambiguous failure of Tumakveh diplomacy came, rather unexpectedly, when Êruzôr journeyed to the court of the

Gondorian king at Osgiliath on Anduin. Turambar, the sixth monarch to wear the Winged Crown of the South-kingdom since Meneldil son of Anárion, extended to the prince the courtesies of a noble guest, but would not offer him the hand of fellowship. He did not, King Turambar said, question the goodwill of the Bellakaranî. His misgivings came, rather, from reports that had reached him concerning the manner of divine worship the Tumakveh had instituted in Bellakar. This seemed to Turambar a deliberate mockery of the rituals that the Line of Anárion practiced in affirmation of their right to rule in the lands of the Faithful.

"There is but one fane wherein the invocation of Eru Ilúvatar may lawfully be voiced on behalf of the Dúnedain," declared Turambar, "one kingly line to whom that authority has been granted. The hallow of Mindolluin stands in the land of Gondor, not in Bellakar. By the grace of the Valar the sons of Elendil were appointed to offer prayers and supplications on behalf of the Faithful, and we have not heard that our forefathers—not even the King's Men of Ar-Pharazôn—ever dared to profane the worship of the One with Southron blasphemies. Therefore say this to your grandfather: If Urdubâr would have the friendship of Gondor, let him take counsel with himself, and remember who and what he is."

Elsewhere on the journey, questions Gondorians felt about the worthiness of the Bellakaranî as allies or the legitimacy of their lineage had been muted in the interests of trade and diplomacy, but Turambar was willful and little used to dealing with foreigners as equals. To his rebuke Êruzôr replied only: "Do not forget that our forefathers were at your side and not against you during the Last Alliance, and that Zagarthôr was at his own request placed under command of Elendil, Lord of the Faithful. The siege of Pelargir was lifted with the arrival of our host, and our forefathers fought beside you upon Dagorlad against the Shadow. We are not Ârûwanâi, and do not desire to be associated with their blasphemies against the One. We have always maintained true allegiance to the One, not to the King's Men."

The words of Turambar troubled Urdubâr and soured relations between their realms. However, Turambar was devoted to peace, and wished ill to no man, least of all his own ship-builders and merchant alliances. Trade treaties were signed, and agreements to share letters of mutual interest concerning the lords of Umbar. But there was no formal alliance with Gondor.

Though they wished to keep bonds of friendship with the Bellakaranî, the Faithful held in reverence the heirs of Elendil. They regarded it as perilous to set at naught their judgement in matters of the spirit, deeming them to be true diviners of the will of Eru and the invisible Powers. But the Tumakveh found no fault with the deeds of Zimrêbal their forefather, and to them the words of Turambar sounded proud and self-centered. In the end, Gondor was a distant land, and the rulers of Bellakar could afford to ignore the arrogant pronouncements of its king.

For the next two centuries the golden age of Bellakar proceeded uninterrupted. All told, Urdubâr ruled his realm in peace for ninety-three years, the longest reign of all the Tumakveh. That line continued for generations in prosperity and relative peace.

It was in the days of King Nîlûhîn of Bellakar that the kings of Gondor began to extend their sway southward in Haruzan and the coastlands of Belfalas Bay, which brought the heirs of Elendil into conflict with Umbar. This was a realignment of power the Bellakaranî could not afford to ignore. Their relations with Umbar had never been cordial, but they had fought no overt wars either. Conflict between Gondor and Umbar would have significant consequences for trade by both land and sea.

THE RISE OF THE SHIP-KINGS (TA 748-795)

By the early 8th century of the Third Age, the Gondorians were beginning to experience the same tensions that had already wracked the Ârûwanâi of Umbar and the Southlands. Erosion of Númenórean bloodlines made the traditional exclusivity of the Dúnedain more and more precarious. The havens of the Anfalas in particular began to vie with one another for the loyalties of an increasingly mixed populace, precipitating violent conflict within and between league communities. The Pelargirean league, long the closely held domain of Dúnadan traditionalists and racial purists, had nothing they could concede to the restless commoners of Anfalas, and no precedent or will to suppress them.

Not long after assuming the Winged Crown in 748, the new king of Gondor, Siriondil, appointed his son Tarannon "Captain of the Hosts" and commanded him to restore order to Anfalas. After four years of disputation, bullying and fighting, Tarannon subjugated the anarchic coastlands. He had revealed the corruption and weakness of the old forms of government and, in 754, Siriondil decreed the dissolution of the Pelargirean league, bringing its territories under direct royal rule as provinces of Gondor.

In the chaotic years leading up to this event, many of the factions among the independently-minded league-cities had turned to Arnor, Bellakar and even Umbar for aid. Nîlûhîn of Bellakar steered a cautious course through the turmoil, balancing his desire to cultivate good relations with trading partners while taking care not to antagonize the Gondorian king. He saw, in any event, that the crisis afflicting Gondor was the same one—between Adûnâi and Bellakaze—as had tormented his own land a thousand years previous. The traditionalists fighting to keep control of the Pelargirean league would have stood against the Tumakveh in the distant quarrel. In the end, Nîlûhîn kept his own counsel. When the struggle had been decided in favor of the "mixed-blooded" of Gondor and their king, Nîlûhîn felt it politick to make some gesture of goodwill towards the rising power in Belfalas Bay.

Intent on avoiding a repetition of Urdubâr's failed embassy, Nîlûhîn wisely refrained from any talk of formal alliance between the two realms. Instead, he sent his young son Narkuzîr to be a companion of Tarannon in his travels. This posture suited Siriondil's sense of propriety, and he received Narkuzîr into his court, calling him by the Quenya form of his name: Thorondil. Whatever his attitude towards Tumakveh religious practice, the Gondorian king was foresighted enough to realize that his realm's growing rivalry with Umbar might come to crisis in his reign, in which conflict the goodwill of Bellakar might prove strategically valuable. Both monarchs hoped that a close relationship between their sons would at least hold out the promise of friendlier ties between their realms in the future.

The match was successful. A strong friendship was soon born between the two princes as the Captain of the Hosts turned his attention to the reordering of the Haruze principalities between the Poros and Harnen. In addition to his good looks and personable nature, Narkuzîr proved to be a great diplomatic asset to Tarannon, familiar as the Tumakveh heir was with the languages and customs of Harad. But the court of Osgiliath in the days of its splendor left a deep impression upon Narkuzîr in turn, and from this came a seed of dissension that would herald the end of the golden age of Tumakveh rule.

In the course of his sojourn in Gondor, Narkuzîr came to revere the traditions of the Elendili, especially the form and fashion of their religious observances, becoming convinced that in these lay the ultimate cause for the success that seemed to attend every Gondorian undertaking. Embracing this belief, Narkuzîr felt that

the worship of his own land had indeed strayed from the true and unadulterated faith preserved by the line of Meneldil, and he conceived of one day restoring this pure religion to Bellakar. For many years Narkuzîr kept such thoughts to himself, pondering by what means he might purge the Kâthasaptha of its heathen accretions and bind it to the ceremonial of the Faithful.

Narkuzîr spent almost four years at Tarannon's side, and returned to Gondor often over the next two decades, but in 795 word came to him in Osgiliath that Nîlûhîn his father had died, and that he must now take up the kingship of Bellakar. So Narkuzîr parted company with the son of Siriondil for the last time, but not before revealing to his friend his ideas concerning the reform of Bellakarian worship and his hope of lasting alliance between their two realms. Perceiving Narkuzîr's sincerity, Tarannon promised his friend that he would do all within his power to help him realize his vision when Tarannon inherited the Winged Crown.

Narkuzîr ruled Bellakar as king for over half a century before that day came. During those years, he continued to keep secret his religious designs, essaying only one change in the order of worship. Unable to tolerate the utterance of Ladnoca's name alongside the One, Narkuzîr banned her invocation upon the Izindutârik. Unfortunately for the young king, he did not share the religious sensitivity of his forefather Zimrêbal, nor the cunning to deflect potential opposition. No dream-vision from the goddess was proclaimed to legitimize the king's actions in the eyes of his Bellakaze subjects, and the public reaction was correspondingly virulent.

The first year of Narkuzîr's rule might have ended in violent rebellion had not his younger and more practical-minded brother, Artârik, interceded to salvage the situation. Putting a positive spin on Narkuzîr's decree, Artârik explained that Ladnoca's removal from the Festival of First-fruits was only intended to enhance her standing. Out of his devotion to the goddess, the king was prepared to reunite Ladnoca with her sister by allowing a shrine of Ishtra to be added to Ladnoca's temple in Nîlûlondê. There the goddesses would receive cult together, unsubordinated to the Númenórean deity. In token of the goddesses' elevation, Artârik added, both the king and his brother would take wives from among the Zadan an-Aranî, a prominent Esmerian family of Adûnaic origin whose scions, over the centuries, had wholly embraced the cult of Ishtra.

Little of this was to Narkuzîr's liking; but faced with the prospect of insurrection, the king acceded to his brother's counsel. Small love was there between Narkuzîr and his queen, Zâirinzil an-Aranî; but because their union was now essential to the stability of his realm, the king endured her. Only their daughter, Barûthhîn, was Narkuzîr resolved not to allow to become "corrupted" by Bozishnara religious ways, and he forbade her mother to impart to their child any doctrine save the worship of Eru.

Zâirinzil's piety and a mother's love prevailed over the king's command. In secret, Zâirinzil inculcated her daughter in the worship of Ishtra, telling Barûthhîn that Eru was but a name that men used to distort the workings of the goddess and usurp her glory. Barûthhîn grew wise in the teachings of her mother, and a mystical bond grew between them that not even the king could break.

Narkuzîr, however, made no indication that he planned any further tampering with the religious impasse that had been reached, until his boyhood friend Tarannon succeeded the rule of his father in the name of Falastur in 830. In that year, much to the dismay of daughter and mother alike, Narkuzîr announced Barûthhîn's betrothal to the king of Gondor and, through this marriage, his plans to purify the worship of Eru.

NARKUZÎR'S REFORM (TA 795-830)

Having segregated Eru from the Bozishnara cults, the zealous Tumakveh now renounced his family's claim to preside over the worship of the One, acknowledging this to be the unique prerogative of Elendil's heirs. Bellakarian reverence for Eru would henceforth be restricted to the ancient "standing silence" which their Númenórean forebears had observed on holy days while the Meneltarma still stood. In order to prevent the Izindutârik from ever vying with Mindolluin in Gondor, the king forbade any to ascend it. In recognition of this act of repentance, the kings of Gondor, now joined by marriage to the Tumakveh house, would intercede for the Bellakaranî upon Mindolluin, admitting them into the fellowship of the Elendili.

In the eyes of many Bellakaranî —Bellakaze and Adûnâi alike—Narkuzîr had gone too far. Whatever respect their king had built up in the years following the Ishtra incident now evaporated. Gondorian recognition of Bellakar as a realm of the Faithful, equal in prestige and honor with Gondor and Arnor, had been a long-coveted goal of many in Bellakar—particularly among the merchants and Adûnaic nobility; but not at the price of their ancestral religion. To the majority of his subjects, Narkuzîr's overture smacked of servility towards Elendilian arrogance and irreverence for the time-hallowed traditions established by the Tumakveh. Their king's "elevation" of Ladnoca had been mere pretense, a smokescreen to abandon his native heritage and please his idolized boyhood companion.

Unlike his earlier misadventure in religious politics, however, this time Narkuzîr had prepared. He had full control over the Bellakarian government, army and fleet. He was at peace with Bozisha-Miraz and the Thânî Hazad. Umbar was no longer friendly with Bellakar, but Tarannon of Gondor, now Narkuzîr's kinsman, served as a counterbalance to any threat Umbar might pose. The good will of the richest nation in western Endor was not something any leader would squander. But, in 830, the matter had not yet come to the edge of the sword, as the saying went. The knowledge of Narkuzîr's prowess as a king and captain counseled caution in the hearts of his opponents.

Chief among the opposition was Narkuzîr's brother, Artârik, who was convinced that the terms of the reform spelled the downfall of their family. When it became plain that no reconciliation could be achieved, Artârik left his brother's side, enduring a self-imposed exile in Esmer among his Aranî kinsfolk. Alienated as he was, though, Artârik refused all invitations by Narkuzîr's enemies to supplant his brother. Artârik had not forgotten the Tedjin. They lived peacefully among the Bellakaranî solely because they had been beaten in battle those many years ago, and he rightly guessed that any outbreak of civil war in Bellakar would encourage an uprising along the desert frontier.

Less scrupulous in opposition to the king's reform was his wife, Zâirinzil. To her, Narkuzîr's actions were a total betrayal of his people and his own daughter, "sacrificed" in payment for the friendship of strangers whose lips profaned the name of the goddess. Secretly Zâirinzil forged ties with any who declared enmity towards her husband, and plotted to break the alliance with Gondor so that Barûthhîn might be restored to her. Who can say what dark and infernal powers may have hearkened to the queen's prayers in her desperation?

THE CHILDLESS KING (TA 830-840)

Though pleasing to the Gondorians and their king, the newfound alliance with Bellakar did not entirely elude obstacles cast in its path, the greatest of which was Tarannon's queen, Barûthhîn, her name now partly Sindarized in form to *Berúthiel*. Like her mother, Berúthiel felt betrayed, though at first she played the du-

tiful daughter, bending to her father's will for the sake of the realm. In time, though, the burden of her people's sorrows and her own devotion to Ishtra overthrew all claims of duty.

Life in strange land, far from kith and kin, was difficult for the Tumakveh princess, and attempts to share her customs and beliefs were met with universal ridicule and condescension by the Faithful. Soon all love had died within the heart that had embraced the goddess of love. Increasingly estranged from her husband and his court, Berúthiel withdrew from public life. Vicious rumors began to circulate in Osgiliath that the reclusive queen was turning back to the "Black Númenórean" ways of her people. Some were even so bold as to accuse her of using sorcery to spy upon the Faithful for her own nefarious purposes, and that she would leave the line of Meneldil barren of an heir.

Whatever the truth or falsity of the tales that attached themselves to Queen Berúthiel in those tragic years, this last charge was certainly true. Tarannon's queen bore him no children, making him the first childless king of his house. The causes of this were never revealed, but in the year 840, the tenth of their ill-fated marriage, amid even more mysterious circumstances, Tarannon set the daughter of Narkuzîr and Zâirinzil adrift on a ship, alone on the sea before a north wind, and caused her name to be erased from the Book of the Kings. The ultimate fate of Berúthiel is unknown, but her expulsion from Gondor made one thing very clear: the alliance was over.

NARKUZÎR'S ABDICATION (TA 840-842)

By 840, the only thing capable of saving Narkuzîr's reputation in the eyes of his subjects was victory in war, and that is exactly what he got. Perhaps taking advantage of the unrest in Bellakar, an army of mercenaries from Bozisha-Miraz, the Qarsag, allied themselves with dissatisfied Tedjin and Aukuag clans and chose this moment to launch a raiding expedition into southern Bellakar. Narkuzîr was quick to mobilize available royal forces and the militia of the Kadîr of the south against this new danger. Personally commanding the right wing of the host, the king persuaded his brother, Artârik, to forget his quarrel and assume control of the left. The opposing armies met on a barren thorn-prairie not far from Nîlûlondê, where a caravan trail from the Auz Bekar came down from the hills. The battle was hard fought, but with Narkuzîr's tactical acumen the Qarsag were beaten and scattered.

The victory would have been fleeting for the king, however, in the wake of the failure of his alliance with Gondor. Whether Narkuzîr maintained his personal convictions or had suffered a loss of faith is not recorded, but he realized that his vision could no longer be imposed on the people without grievous damage to his realm. To the amazement of all, within one week of the victory, Narkuzîr announced his abdication in favor of his brother, since none of his own children or grandchildren commanded the respect of the Bellakaze elite. Artârik an-Aranî consented to this on the condition (not known to the public) that Narkuzîr remain his unofficial counselor.

Artârik's first act as king was to nullify his brother's religious reform, restoring the traditional Kâthasaptha. He did not, however, rescind the ban on the invocation of Ladnoca on the Izindutârik (a concession, no doubt, to the small but still powerful party of Adûnaic traditionalists that had supported Narkuzîr's reforms, and perhaps also with a view to one day mending broken ties with Gondor).

The honor of the Tumakveh family had been preserved, its ascendancy once again enjoying virtually universal support from its subjects, though its international prestige was now thrown into question by Barûthhîn's expulsion. But the seeds of religious ferment sown in the years of Narkuzîr's reform still germinated in the variegated soil of Bellakar, awaiting an hour ripe for yet another upheaval.

The self-proclaimed inheritor of this renewed outbreak of spiritual discontent was Imrathôr Izindubêth. A Bellakaze merchant of modest means from Narîk-zadan, Imrathôr became the leader of a new religious movement that offered yet another solution to the age-old problem of reconciling the Bozishnara pantheon and its cults with the absolute monotheism of the Adûnâi.

THE TRUE FAITH (TA 842-884)

At dawn on the 13th day of the month of Najam, in the third year of the reign of Artârik an-Aranî, it came to pass that Imrathôr, while pursuing his vocation in the bazaars of Hazaj Tollin, felt within his heart a mysterious summons to journey into the foothills of the Hulja Mountains, many leagues distant from the city. Searching for he knew not what, Imrathôr found that his feet were leading him to the tall summit of Urud an-Khibil. On that silent height, hidden from the eyes of Man, Imrathôr beheld a vision that was to change his life.

After many days of fasting and solitude in the wilderness, the merchant returned to Hazaj Tollin, proclaiming all that he had seen and heard. Imrathôr claimed to have received a visitation from the One: "The One whom the Adûnâi name Êru, whom the Tumakveh deem Infinite in Wisdom—this One has sent me to make known the Batân an-Izindi, the Path of Truth, to those who will listen." In token of this claim, Imrathôr took the title of Izindubêth, the "Prophet of Truth."

These words caused a great stir in Hazaj Tollin, and report of them very soon spread to the other cities of the realm. Reactions ranged from disbelief and speechless wonder to incensed outcry and accusations of blasphemy. Bellakarian religious sensitivities had been strained to the limit over the past decades, and most were understandably hostile toward any hint of disruption of the delicate balance that had been so dearly bought by their new king. Not surprisingly, Artârik an-Aranî felt the same way, and gave orders for this bold upstart to be brought before him.

Soon, Imrathôr found himself standing in the presence of the Tumakveh king at Nîlûlondê. Long and searchingly Artârik questioned him concerning his summons and vision, essaying to unmask him if he were a fraud, and to discern, if he might, how this teaching might bode for the peace of the realm. A true descendant of Zimrêbal, Artârik an-Aranî was no fool: for him, piety must always be tempered by political necessity.

But there was neither fear nor guile on the lips of Imrathôr as he propounded to the king the divine message with which he claimed to have been entrusted. He declared the uniqueness of the One, saying that He alone created the universe through the Kôlir, the Powers whom the Men of the West called the Balâi. Through the Kôlir Eru created Bellakar and all lands, but Man He created without their mediation. Imrathôr went on to name the Kôlir, identifying each of the Balâi with a Bozishnara deity.

Thus far the Izindubêth had uttered nothing contrary to the traditional beliefs of the Bellakaranî nor against the Kâthasaptha. But now Imrathôr gave cause for concern. "Because He is infinite and beyond comprehension," explained the Izindubêth, "it is not fitting for ordinary mortals to worship Eru with words and rituals, at times and places set by human wisdom, but only through silent contemplation of His greatness. Instead, Eru commands that Men honor Him through offering cult to the Kôlir; for being the children of Eru, the Kôlir reveal aspects of the One to His creation."

"If what you say is true," broke in the sagacious king, "do you not take the goddess for a liar? Is it not by the command of Lad-

noca that the Tumakveh invoke the One upon the Izindutârik at the appointed times? How then shall we honor the Kôlir if we disobey their statutes, or do the gods rebel against Him who made them?"

To this Imrathôr gave the following reply: "O King, whatever the Kôlir command of you must be obeyed. But all times and seasons are at the beck and call of Êru, and to His will even the Kôlir must bend. Once the goddess spoke to the Tumakveh, and gave to them counsel for the perfection of their piety. But the people have strayed from the path of truth, giving to Ladnoca and her sister what belongs to Êru alone. Nor have the Tumakveh escaped offense; for in redressing this profanation, they have taught many to abandon right worship of the Kôlir.

Hear then the will of Êru: *For the sake of the piety of Ladnoca My daughter, the Tumakveh alone may continue to utter My name upon the hallow of Izindutârik at the times she has appointed; but because of their sins, the Bellakaranî shall worship Me in silence only. And let no man spurn the Kôlir or neglect their worship; for thus shall he honor My will.*"

The Izindubêth fell silent. The king too and all his court made no answer. How could such words be countered without provoking the wrath either of the Adûnaic traditionalists or the devotees of the goddess? For each agreed with a part of Imrathôr's message, though they rejected the rest. To openly denounce the Izindubêth would risk alienating both factions, whereas to attempt an accommodation to only those parts of his oracle that endorsed the status quo would indict the king of duplicity—either he accepted the words of Imrathôr as a divine revelation, or he did not. Never before had a Tumakveh been placed in so awkward a position.

But Artârik an-Aranî rose to the occasion. To Imrathôr he answered with these words: "Êru did not make me His Izindubêth, only a king who honors the piety of his fathers. If by this I do wrong in His eyes, He shall see fit to punish me. But whether your words be those of a true seer or no, time alone shall tell. Go your way, and act according to the wisdom that has been given you. And if there be any on whom your words fall pleasingly, they may join you; but I shall preserve the ways that have been handed down to me by Ladnoca, and will suffer neither you or any who follow you to hinder those who abide by those ways."

All the court was amazed at the prudence of Artârik's reply. The Izindubêth, bowing, took his leave of the king. Free now of royal interference, Imrathôr resumed his proclamation of the Batân an-Izindi, gathering followers throughout the cities and countryside. The majority of the Bellakaranî remained unmoved by his message, being content with participation in the Kâthasaptha and its festivals. The sect initially found adherents among the mercantile and intellectual classes, who by virtue of their itinerant lifestyle or philosophical reservations were less attached to the national religion. Opposition was fiercest from Adûnaic and Ladnocan extremists, who found the new movement a convenient scapegoat for their own frustrated programs. In time, however, as it became clear that the Kâthasaptha would tolerate no further religious changes, the purists began to lose popular support and failed to replenish their numbers. The currents of spiritual dissent were now flowing into Imrathôr's camp.

Having carried his message to the far corners of Bellakar, the Izindubêth returned to the place of his summons and there, with the aid of his followers, commenced construction of a monastery. The purpose of this complex was to provide a locus of pilgrimage for those seeking guidance in the Batân an-Izindi. Unlike the Izindutârik, the mountain of Imrathôr's vision was not to become the site of annual religious festivals "with words and rituals, at times and places set by human wisdom." Nevertheless, the Izindubêth allowed the month of Najam to become a ritualized period of fasting for adherents of the faith, in commemoration of the divine summons.

As the movement spread and its converts flocked to Urud an-Khibil, Imrathôr was increasingly besought as a judge and an arbiter of disputes. The rulings of the Izindubêth on various matters, mundane and spiritual, were committed to writing by his followers, so that over the years a substantial body of ethical wisdom and social norms came to be associated with the sect. A code of honor developed that owed much to the values enshrined in the *Kat Polojaz*, the Bozishnara national epic, but which also contained significant innovations inspired by its peculiar blend of Númenórean monotheism and philosophically interpreted Bellakaze polytheism.

Chief among these innovations stood the principles of the spiritual equality of all peoples, Adûnâ and Southron alike, and an internalized ideal of spiritual peace. The first of these principles, while clearly influenced by early Númenórean theology, dispensed with the racially-based moral hierarchies subscribed to even by the Elendili. The mystical concept of inner peace as a religious goal, on the other hand, resonated with the creed of Esmerian goddess worship, though now "restored" to its proper referent: Eru.

Nothing fires religious zeal more powerfully than persecution, and the followers of the Batân an-Izindi were about to receive just such a spur to their resolve. Scarcely a generation after the sect had established itself, the Tedjin invaded Bellakar anew in vast numbers. In the conflagration that was to follow, the Izindubêth would meet his death and the monastery on Urud an-Khibil would be destroyed.

THE CREED OF MEN (TA 830-884)

By the 9th century of the Third Age, the Adûnâi of Umbar had lost much of the Númenórean identity which their counterparts in Bellakar had tried so carefully to maintain. The Umbareans had preserved much lore of ships and the sea—more so than any other Númenórean successor realm in Endor—but less of the traditions of law and culture that had kept Númenor strong in spite of its long centuries of corruption and decay. Their common folk spoke a dialect of Westron, like the realms of the Faithful to the north, and their aristocracy classical Adûnaic, like the Ârûwanâ regimes in the South. In personal appearance and lifespan most of them were, like the Bellakaranî, more of the Haradrim than of any other race. But though their blood and customs had been transformed by time and their intermarriage with the men of Endor, they inherited without lessening their hatred for Gondor, an ancient enmity which the deeds of Tarannon Falastur had now rekindled.

Like Korlea in Bellakar, Umbar had been a stronghold for the cult of Mulkhêr in the days of Ar-Pharazôn; unlike the Mulkhêrians of Korlea, those of Umbar survived Númenor's Downfall and continued to serve Sauron eagerly until his defeat by the Last Alliance. Many of these Black Númenóreans fell at Dagorlad and upon the walls of the Dark Tower, fighting to the last in their religiously-inspired fervor. After report of Sauron's defeat reached Umbar, those Ârûwanâi remaining in the haven and along the Sakal an-Khâr (the coasts of the sea as far north as the mouth of the River Khârurush) named new leaders for themselves. These lords succeeded in maintaining Umbar's power for many lives of Men, maintaining a wary peace with the realms of the Faithful and rebuilding their trading empire in Haruzan and southward far along the shores of Belegaer.

The utter vanquishment of Sauron, whom they had held to be Mulkhêr's representative on earth, caused many in Umbar to doubt and fall away from the worship of the Dark. For many years the site of Mulkhêr's terrible fane within the citadel of their

haven lay unused and forlorn, and as the descendants of the King's Men re-shaped their lives after the fashion of the nations of Middle-earth, so too did the shadow of their ancient worship secretly reassert itself in Haradon guise.

By the 830s the Council of Captains in Umbar was divided in thought over how best to maintain their power against Tarannon's encroachments upon their northern frontier of Zâyan an-Khârurush (now called by their Gondorian neighbors "Harnendor"). Some advocated open naval warfare, at least, in alliance with the Haradon realms who shared their fears of the pride and strength of the heirs of Elendil. Others advised caution and diplomacy, for war with Gondor would ruin their oceanic trade with the north and threaten the same to the south, where the Tumakveh had for many years been Umbar's rival for control of the sea-lanes.

But one of the councilors—Zagarkhâd by name—looked to a more primordial power for their salvation and final victory: the Lord of the Dark. The youngest of many sons fathered by one of the haven's powerful nobles, Zagarkhâd had few prospects for advancement in the highly competitive arena of Umbarean politics. He turned instead to the quest for arcane knowledge, and upon that road he found others of similar mind, both in Umbar and among the Nuzhaj, a venerable order of Haruze scholars that had its roots in the Dark Years of the Second Age.

The Nuzhaj hearkened back to a time when the Haruze ruled their own land, free from Númenórean tyranny. Some of them, a secret society known as the Nunazhme, remembered that the Haruze had once prospered as mighty allies of Sauron of Mordor. From these scholars Zagarkhâd and his fellows learned forgotten tongues of lore that opened to them books and scrolls of lost wisdom handed down in secret through many generations of Nuzhaj, and out of that dark wisdom was sprung in their minds a creed by which Umbar might prevail over the Lord of the Coasts and his fleets: the Zâur an-Anî, the "Creed of Men," which they would teach to the Adûnâi and make them strong again.

Such was the name they gave to a shadowy legend preserved in the shrouded tomes of the Nunazhme. It told of the origin of Men, of how they had at first been threatened by the Devourer in the Dark, and of how the Lord of the Dark taught Men to subjugate the Devourer and make it their servant. They realized that this Dark Lord was none other than He whom Zagarkhâd's Ârûwanâ ancestors named Mulkhêr. But though the Ârûwanâi had worshipped Him, they had failed.

Why had they failed? The Nunazhme taught that the Poganin (the "Heathen" or "Ungodly," as the Haruze derisively called the Númenóreans) were corrupters of Men, and that through their own hubris they had destroyed themselves. Though right to acknowledge the Lord of the Dark, they had been led astray by their craven fear of Death, the Fate of Men, to make war on the gods. Sauron, the Nunazhme believed, had set this temptation before the Poganin to test their worthiness. They failed the test.

Now, the Advocates of the Zâur an-Anî taught their followers, the world was changing again. Now the sons of the Adûnâi had been given a chance to show their worthiness to serve the Lord of the Dark, to defeat the Elendili of Gondor and dominate western Middle-earth. They would teach the Zâur an-Anî secretly to all of Umbar, and when their followers had seized control of the haven, they would restore the temple of Mulkhêr to its former glory—nay, it would be greater in glory, just as they were greater than the Dúnedain of Gondor and their worthless cousins in Arnor. Then they would show the Elendili who were the true "Kings of Men."

Zagarkhâd, almost alone among the Creed Advocates, possessed a strong strategic sense. After four decades of open preaching and quiet subversion, he hit upon the idea that any attempt to defeat Gondor must also deal with the realm of Bellakar. Even with the failure of the Tumakveh marriage alliance with Tarannon, Bellakar was a serious strategic threat to Umbar's control of the sea-routes to southern Endor. Umbar had no means of conquering Bellakar while Gondor was pressing upon its own borders, so Zagarkhâd resolved to find a way to defeat the Tumakveh by other means.

THE TEDJIN-QARSAG INVASION (TA 884)

In his travels, Zagarkhâd visited lower Khand and found there two Tedjin clans, remnants of those who had remained loyal to Ûvatha during the Last Alliance and who were still employed as mercenaries by a shrunken Variag realm. They were well-armed, staunch worshippers of the Shadow cults, and willing to take gold to join a war a thousand miles away.

With the core of an invading horde commissioned, Zagarkhâd gathered some of their leaders and traveled secretly across the Haradwaith, seeking out the discontented among the Tedjin of Bellakar, as well as the impoverished Qarsag survivors. The Tedjin had lived at the bottom rung of Bellakarian society for generations. When some of their desert clans had joined the Qarsag invasion, the Bellakaze had driven thousands of them out of the cities as undesirables and the Bellanarod had burned thousands more out of their farms and villages. Here were recruits willing to listen to tales of ancient martial glory. Most, particularly those living on the desert frontier, were still skilled warriors. Zagarkhâd provided leaders to train them in the old Tedjin worship of the Dark Lord and the skills of professional soldiers.

In spite of the complexity of Zagarkhâd's conspiracy, the Tumakveh failed to get clear wind of it until it was too late. They had done too thorough a job of isolating the Tedjin villages; now they would pay the price. In 884, raiding parties struck across Bellakar's frontier from the desert of the Stone Fields in the north to the Auz Bekar and the Bozishnara border in the south. A hundred Bellanara villages and dozens of guard posts on the inland roads were overrun in the first weeks of war, while cavalry patrols sent to find the source of the terror vanished in clouds of bloody dust.

An aging Artârik an-Aranî quickly mobilized his army north of Nîlûlondê, but the king's well-worn tactics were too predictable. Report reached him that the captains of the Tedjin-Qarsag army were commanded by a mysterious figure known as the Shrouded Tarb—Zagarkhâd disguised as a Haruze nobleman—who concentrated the best of his horde of desert horsemen on better ground than the king's. This first confrontation was a bloody defeat, destroying the pick of the Tumakveh soldiery. Artârik himself might have been killed, but his great-nephew, Êruzagar the Warmaker, led a company of heavy cavalry to his rescue, finally dragging the wounded monarch out from under the corpses of his bodyguard. Êruzagar covered a retreat on Nîlûlondê. Here the king began to gather a new army, drawing reinforcements from all southern Bellakar and by sea from the ports of the north.

The Shrouded Tarb had a better grasp of strategy than the Tumakveh's previous foes. Instead of marching directly on Nîlûlondê, he scattered his forces to pillage and secure central and northern Bellakar, collecting recruits and war material as they conquered. Êruzagar led his horsemen in fast, vicious counterattacks along the Batân an-Sakal and warned the king that his enemies were gaining strength, while the Bellakaranî were troubling to assemble a few last companies of militia around the capital. Artârik took the criticism badly. When he finally felt ready to march, he deliberately left his valiant nephew behind to organize the defense of the capital.

The Tedjin gave way as the king marched north, but this retreat had been arranged to give the Shrouded Tarb a chance to gather his forces. Artârik finally found the main army of the Tedjin and Qarsag gathered on east bank the River Tosith, where it met a smaller stream and spread out in a vast grass and quicksand marsh before breaching a line of hills to fall into the coastal plain near Hazaj Tollin. Once again, the Shrouded Tarb had picked better ground than Artârik an-Aranî. On this dry upland, the Bellakaranî were forced to attack to get to good water and the nomad army could use its mass of horse archers to best advantage.

The largest armies ever gathered in Bellakar now hacked and slaughtered each other for most of a day in a killing summer heat. Artârik, lacking his nephew's energy, failed to keep his captains in check, and the Bellakarian line of battle fell apart in early afternoon. Joam-Tuv, the best soldier among the Tedjin chieftains, flanked the Bellakaranî and drove twice ten thousand of them westward into the Tosith marshes. The king and a company of men fought their way north through the center of the Tedjin masses, and a common Bellakaze soldier from Ûrêzâyan managed to put an arrow through the heart of the Shrouded Tarb. Then the Tedjin closed in; Artârik and his guard were brought to bay at the foot of a cliff and fought to the death.

In later years, Urud an-Ârû, the Cliff of the King, could be recognized by travelers by the seal of Artârik an-Aranî engraved hastily on a rock face by a one of his heralds, just before the final Tedjin attack. A three-league stretch of ground along the River Tosith came to be called Zâyan an-Agan, the Field of the Black Death. The bones of the dead buried alongside the road tended to poke out of the arid soil at intervals for centuries after, and pieces of metal and other gear of war, strangely well-preserved, would wash out of the quicksand with every spring flood.

This battlefield, the largest mass grave between Umbar and the Yellow Mountains, was not otherwise marked, but it retained a sinister feel about it even into the early Fourth Age. The ghosts of an entire generation of Bellakarian leaders were said to haunt the Field of the Black Death. Many great families were destroyed here and by the sacking of the cities of Bellakar that followed. The families that replaced them were less wealthy, less confident, less of the Adûnâi than those who came before. When the kingdom found renewal, it would be humbler and poorer, and many who knew how much it had changed would come to the Cliff of the King and speak to an ancestor, seeking their lost wisdom.

THE FALL OF NÎLÛLONDÊ (TA 884-889)

With the death of Artârik, the only hope for the Tumakveh and their supporters lay in the generalship of Êruzagar and the hillforts surrounding the Vale of Nîlûlondê. Hastily confirmed in his kingship, Êruzagar organized a masterful defense of his oasis capital against the Tedjin hosts. The siege of the vale lasted five years, claiming the lives of thousands of Tedjin and Qarsag warriors. Unfortunately, within the walls of Nîlûlondê lurked a traitor. This was Galkar, a Bellanara guard-captain and kinsman to the royal family who sought to bring about the fall of the Tumakveh in requital for a slight to honor which he had suffered at the hands of Êruzagar.

On a night of the dark moon, by pre-arrangement with the Tedjin, Galkar murdered his guard company by poisoning their drinking water. Joam-Tuv, champion of the Field of Black Death and ever the most daring of the Tedjin, brought a large company into the oasis of Nîlûlondê on paths leading out from the desert wastes. Galkar opened the East Gate of the city to the enemy and Joam-Tuv spearheaded the assault, making straight for the royal palace.

Foreseeing defeat, Êruzagar ordered his twenty-two year old son Adûnuzîr to flee the city and seek refuge among their Bozishnara allies on the Forest Coast. Adûnuzîr at first resisted his father's command, refusing to abandon his people to the invader. But Êruzagar rebuked him sternly, saying: "Obey my words! If you would blot out the disgrace of the Field of Black Death, you must forego your vengeance until the hour is right; for none who fight within these walls shall live to see the dawn. But you are the last of the Tumakveh. If you draw your sword this night, our house shall come to an end and no hope will be left for our people. Fly now, and avenge yourself another day!"

His words at an end, Êruzagar embraced his son for the last time and turned away to meet his fate. Wasting no time, lest Êruzagar's sacrifice should be in vain, Zimrathôr, loyal adviser to the king and guardian of Adûnuzîr, hastened the young prince through the palace, accompanied by a few guards, to a hidden escape tunnel known only to the Tumakveh and their most trusted counselors. Causing the entrance of the tunnel to be collapsed so that none could pursue them, Zimrathôr guided his royal charge to the tunnel exit, near the edge of the oasis of Nîlûlondê, where fresh horses and provisions had been prepared for just such an eventuality. By the time their escape was discovered, the last heir of the Tumakveh was well on his way to the safety of the Forest Coast.

But the hour of Nîlûlondê's doom had come. The Qarsag now held the walls, the Tedjin had broken through the palace gates. The Tumakveh king rallied the remnants of his elite guard for a last, desperate counter-charge against the enemy's ranks. In that grim onslaught Êruzagar slew two sons of Joam-Tuv and many others of their house before he was taken, alive, beneath a mountain of Tedjin dead. The last of the palace defenders were butchered and the massacre of Nîlûlondê's people began. The vengeful Tedjin showed little mercy to the Bellakaranî, remembering a three decades of affliction at their hands. The only ones to survive that night of unspeakable horror were those marked out for slavery by their new masters.

Thus far the designs of the Shrouded Tarb had succeeded: the Easterling allies of the Zâur an-Anî now occupied the capital of Bellakar, its other cities had all but succumbed to the invaders, and the lords of Umbar could now challenge the might of Gondor with both their southern and eastern frontiers secure. Yet the Tedjin victory was not flawless: report reached Joam from Galkar that the son of Êruzagar was nowhere to be found. Furious, the victorious Tedjin general ordered the captive Tumakveh brought before his "shadow-walkers" (as the Tedjin called their dark shamans).

These were not without sorcerous means for uncovering the hidden thoughts of their enemies. Êruzagar's will was indomitable, and would not yield to his captors the way or destination of his son's flight. But to Joam Êruzagar spoke these words: "Today you have the victory, foul Tedjin, but you and your successors shall not rule Bellakar forever. If your courage equaled that of your sons, you would meet me with a sword in my hand; instead, only in your cowardice do you dare to avenge them."

To this the Tedjin answered: "A man may avenge himself only upon other men; but you are a dog, ruler of a nation of dogs, worthy of a fate reserved for your own kind." With that Joam-Tuv ordered his ravenous wolf-hounds unleashed upon the bound and wounded Tumakveh. So ended Êruzagar the Warmaker, grandson of Narkuzîr, not the least valiant of a valiant house.

THE DEATH OF IMRATHÔR (TA 889-894)

The fall of Nîlûlondê to Joam-Tuv on 22 Tamun, 889 concluded the Tedjin-Qarsag conquest of Bellakar, but it did not mark the end of Bellakarian resistance. Cut off from their king by the five-year siege of the Tumakveh capital, those Bellakaranî still able to carry on the fight found a new leader in Imrathôr, Izindubêth of the Batân an-Izindi. From the fastness of Urud an-Khibil, Imrathôr's followers armed themselves and embarked on a crusade against the Easterling invader, liberating their captured countrymen from the power of the enemy and swelling the ranks of their guerilla band.

The event which triggered this unexpectedly militant reaction was the defilement of the Izindutârik by Tedjin shadow-walkers. Eager to stamp out all trace of Númenórean worship from Bellakar, these unholy shamans, trained in the dark sanctums of distant Khand, polluted the hallow with the blood of a Variag priestess who had offered herself for this purpose, thereby rendering the ground accursed. But they recked little of the Batân an-Izindi, and believed that the sect's disavowal of the Kâthasaptha would blunt any serious opposition from that quarter. They were wrong.

On learning of this unspeakable sacrilege against the One, the aging seer (now ninety-four years old) declared a holy war upon the minions of the Shadow, assuring those of the Batân an-Izindi that Eru and the Kôlir would guide their sword-arms until not a single infidel remained to profane Bellakarian soil with their abominations. Naming his eldest son, Êruzîrôn, to be their commander, Imrathôr sent forth his warriors to do battle with the Easterlings.

But the Izindubêth's zeal had not outrun his wits. He realized that they could not hope to overcome on the open field a foe whom even the Tumakveh with all their might had failed to vanquish. Instead, Imrathôr counseled Êruzîrôn to strike by stealth and ambush under cover of night, that they might teach the enemy anew to fear the dark, the realm whose lord they owned.

For the next five years, Imrathôr's warriors, the Narduwî am-Batân, harried the armies of the Tedjin and brought hope to the Bellakaranî in their affliction. Most were simple country-folk who, waiting until the harvest, abandoned their farms with all the grain they could carry before the arrival of Tedjin foragers, putting the rest to the torch and fleeing to the safety of the mountains. Many who had formerly scorned the sect or had doubted the claims of its spokesman now flocked to Imrathôr's banner. The cause of the Batân an-Izindi was proved not to be incompatible with loyalty to the Tumakveh, who then still held Nîlûlondê. "Their fate is in the hands of Êru," said the Izindubêth; "ours is to carry on their fight, even if they fail."

With the fall of Nîlûlondê, however, the conquering Tedjin-Qarsag army could now devote itself to the eradication of the religious menace that stalked the Hulja Mountains. In the spring of 890, Joam-Tuv was named the first *kataj* of all Bellakar. He set out from the gates of Nîlûlondê with a great host of warriors and slaves and marched north to a great oasis on the western flank of the mountains. There they made a mighty encampment, destined to be the site of Joam's future capital.

From this base Joam sent detachments to occupy strong points about the perimeter of the massif, building forts and towers and cutting off all ways of escape. In time, Imrathôr and his followers were surrounded. Sooner or later the net would be completely closed and they would be trapped. And now they had the dark powers of necromancy, undistracted by other matters, to contend with.

Even so, the Narduwî am-Batân would not break their vow, and being possessed of ample supplies and the advantage of position, they held out against the full might of the *kataj* for nearly five years—as many years and a day as the siege of Nîlûlondê, some said. Deprived of the use of their horses because of the terrain, the Tedjin were forced to become mountaineers, much inferior to Êruzîrôn's nimble fighters, but always more numerous and always replaceable.

Ever and anon the Tedjin shadow-walkers would call forth the powers of Darkness to assail the bodies and spirits of the Faithful, and many were smitten by fell maladies or possessed by unclean spirits; but ever the lightnings of Nadi-manje that wreathed the Hulja Mountains would dispel and confound these sorceries, the radiance of Ladnoca would restore strength and sinew to the defenders, and the rains of Najm would hunt the besiegers as raging mountain torrents that swept them away like sand before an angry wave. So the legends tell.

But the time came when all the passes between the mountains were guarded, all the caves watched, and all the sheep and game of the Hulja were slain or taken by the Tedjin. Finally, the last survivors of the resistance were driven to the hidden monastery of Urud an-Khibil, a high place guarded with walls of native stone, and their they were besieged and awaited their end.

Then came the Blind Night—a dead night, in which the lights of heaven and the allies of wind and rain were denied the defenders—and out of that darkness came a terrible Voice like the voice of thunder: *"Ye fools! To throw away your lives for a fool's fire and a vain hope in lies! None can overcome the power of Darkness but me; for greatest of all is the Dark, and it has no bounds. I came out of the Dark, but I am Its master. Now shall ye be consumed by the Devourer in the Dark. Die, and know that I alone am Lord!"*

All the Narduwî am-Batân were felled by those words, and many swooned and did not awaken; those who succeeded in overmastering the deadly command lifted their eyes to see tongues of flame leaping up around them—the Tedjin had scaled the walls with torches and were setting fire to the monastery! Blades were drawn and cries of death rent the night air. The last battle had been joined.

No defender survived to tell the tale of the massacre of Imrathôr and his warriors, but in after years adherents of the Batân an-Izindi said that a thousand Tedjin fell beneath the swords of three hundred defenders ere they themselves were slain. The corpses of the Faithful were cruelly hewn beyond recognition and left for the carrion-birds. Only the heads of Imrathôr and his sons were preserved, paraded about at spear-tip through the cities of a defeated nation. The monastery was demolished, its stones removed one-by-one to build the fortress of Joam-Tuv on the plain below.

THE TEDJIN YOKE (TA 894-902)

With the extermination of the rebels on Urud an-Khibil in 894, the subjugation of the Bellakaranî was complete. Refugees had fled to the Forest Coast of Bozisha-Miraz, but territorially Bellakar was now entirely in Tedjin hands. The scheme of the Shrouded Tarb being accomplished, Joam-Tuv sent envoys to Umbar confirming friendship and alliance between the two realms. The Zâur an-Anî turned to the next stage in their plans, establishing the supremacy of their beliefs among the lords and people of Umbar.

For his capital, Joam-Tuv took the fortress (also called "Joam") which he had built in the Rôthurush vale, between Hazaj Tollin and the Hulja Mountains. It commanded a strategic route joining the Batân an-Sakal with the inland paths across the Dune Sea. Joam also lay at the center of northern Bellakar, which the Tedjin now called Qadjajar (a Tedjin name meaning "Land of Warriors"), comprising both Mardruak and the Felayja.

To commemorate the inauguration of his rule and the completion of his royal seat, which took place in the same year, Joam

caused the bones of Batou Jochë, last *kataj* of Thri Zirakan who had perished at the hands of Tumakveh forces nearly three and a half centuries before, to be interred in a lavish mausoleum erected beside his own palace. Great pomp and ceremony attended this event, including the grisly sacrifice of two hundred Bellakaranî to appease Batou's ghost.

Although "valorous in battle," the Tedjin were not suited to the task of ruling Bellakar. They could punish rebels and exact tribute from terrified peasants, but they lacked both the skills and the patience to take on the burden of administration. Fortunately for them, they had the Qarsag, who, though mercenaries by trade, were Bozishnarod who understood the language, customs and institutions of the conquered. These found ready employment (as well as ample opportunity for aggrandizement) under the Tedjin regime.

The now defunct Bâitha'n-Kadîr was replaced by a system of *∂jaian* (sing. *∂jai*), military governors appointed and directly responsible to the *kataj*. Adapted from traditional Tedjin concepts of clan leadership, the *∂jaian* were responsible for maintaining garrisons in the cities, administering justice (such as it was under Tedjin rule), and collecting tribute for the *kataj*. While mounted Tedjin companies formed an important element of a city's garrison, most of a *∂jai*'s underlings were Qarsag, the *kataj* having settled most of his veteran warriors on agricultural land, either as cultivators themselves or as landlords to an impoverished Bellanara peasantry.

Joam's goals were simple: to bring prosperity to his people and control the trade routes between Umbar and the Far South. This policy suited the interests of both Qarsag and Tedjin, and so long as Joam did not overtly threaten his powerful Bozishnara neighbors he need not fear any major opposition from that quarter. He was aware of the Bellakarian exiles along the Forest Coast, but as yet the *kataj* knew nothing of Adûnuzîr's presence among them, and so he heeded them little. Also, the powerful realm of Umbar was his ally.

But for the Bellakaranî under Tedjin rule, life had become harsh. The Bellanarod of the countryside lost much of their land to Tedjin settlers, driving them further into grinding poverty. In the cities, the Bellakaze were now forced to share power with overlords less alien but equally repugnant. All the conquered were disarmed and carefully monitored for any signs of rebellion.

Spiritually too the Bellanarod were worse off than their urban counterparts. With the exception of the Batân an-Izindi and the Kâthasaptha, which were outlawed, Joam-Tuv did not particularly care what gods his subjects worshipped—many of his own Qarsag preserved vestiges of their ancestral Bozishnara piety, though usually in a significantly altered form that elevated Vatra—but wherever the Tedjin settled the *kataj* gave them license to pillage and destroy the fanes of the land as a victory-offering to their own warlike deities. By contrast, the plundering of Bellakarian shrines in the cities by unscrupulous *∂jaian*, while not unknown, remained an uncommon occurrence so long as the Bellakaze did nothing to offend their masters.

Some degree of accommodation, however, was necessary in order for both conqueror and conquered to survive. Few among the invaders had been farmers, and fewer still were sufficiently accustomed to the clime and soil of Bellakar to entice the land to yield its bounty. Only the Bellanarod possessed this knowledge. If they perished from hunger or too harsh exactions, their Tedjin lords would also become imperiled in this arid country.

In the cities as well, compromise rather than outright oppression was the rule. Regarded as second-class citizens by the proud Tedjin and having no natural basis for authority among the people they were to rule, many of the Qarsag governors sought marriage connections and other social ties with the most powerful Bellakaze families. The same was true for their subordinates. Yet too strong a tie would put these Bellakaze collaborators at risk, lest their dependents lose faith in their commitment to their own people, and so undermine their moral authority in the eyes of their countrymen.

Perhaps the most lasting effect of the conquest was the emergence of an entire generation of Bellakaranî—both bastards and legitimate offspring—with Tedjin-Qarsag blood. Although some of the invaders (particularly among the nomadic Tedjin) brought their families with them, the majority settled Bellakar in need of wives. While sharing with the Qarsag a less elevated status among the conquerors and a good deal of stigma from the Bellakaranî, this generation was born and came to maturity under Tedjin rule, without experience of any other kind of existence.

The sense of loyalty possessed by these mixed-bloods, called *Sorija*, was therefore somewhat different than that of their parents in the generation that had gone before them. Having little or no motivation to "liberate" themselves (except from their low station in society), the Sorija posed no threat to Tedjin rule; hence they could be trusted with certain positions in the government and military. But their roots were firmly on Bellakarian soil, so they did not view their world quite so nomadically as their rulers. Bellakar was their home, and they would fight for it.

Though limited in their social prospects, one arena offered an especially open field for Sorijan advancement: employment in the fleets. Many of the Tumakveh naval forces had escaped capture by the invader and withdrew with their ships to friendly ports along the southern and eastern coasts of the Bay of Tulwang, whence some continued to harry Tedjin-held Bellakar as freebooters and pirates. In order to counter this threat, the Zâur an-Anî arranged for Umbarean shipwrights and captains to offer their services to the *∂jaian* of Bellazen and the Felayja. The activities of these foreign military experts was Nykkea, a port-town upon the Cape of Mardruak, newly-founded in 894 as a center for shipbuilding.

Knowing nothing of warfare on the sea, the *kataj* entrusted the coastal defense of the realm to his more maritime-savvy Bozishnara officers based in Nykkea, and this gave the Qarsag governors full authority to organize and train a navy as they saw fit. Because of their outlook and adaptability, the Sorija were ideal recruits. By the end of the first generation of Tedjin rule, Joam-Tuv had at his disposal a fleet that, if not yet formidable enough to become a tool of future conquests, was quite capable of holding its own against any threat to the coastlands of the *kataj*.

ADÛNUZÎR'S EXILE (TA 889-902)

For two decades Joam-Tuv ruled Bellakar oblivious of the actions of the last surviving Tumakveh heir, Adûnuzîr son of Êruzagar the Warmaker, who all the while had been quietly gathering manpower and resources at Taôch on the Forest Coast. Well-instructed by his adviser Zimrathôr, Adûnuzîr gathered round himself the Bellakarian exiles, especially the ship-captains still loyal to his house, and requested help from the Dar and the Forest Coast.

The towns and villages of the Forest Coast were vulnerable to Tedjin encroachments, and their strategic position along the Batân an-Sakal made them a tempting prize for the *∂jai* of Esmer. A tenuous peace held between Joam-Tuv and Bozisha-Dar, based on mutual interests in maintaining the caravan routes and maritime trade on the Bay of Tulwang. This truce guaranteed the Forest Coast independence from the *kataj*, but it did not protect its Bozishnara settlements from Sorijan piracy, often tolerated and

even tacitly supported by the *ðjaian* of the coastal cities of Bellakar. For this reason Adûnuzîr found ready support for his cause among the people of the coast.

The reaction of the Katedrala to the Tumakveh's plight was more guarded, and its regents were divided in opinion. Joam-Tuv and the Tedjin now had a firm hold on the trade routes upon which the Dar's prosperity depended. Throughout their invasion of Bellakar Joam's forces had purposely avoided antagonizing Raj, thereby undercutting any ready pretext for Bozishnara intervention on behalf of their neighbors.

Ultimately, however, the Men of Raj were a pragmatic lot. Tedjin-Qarsag rule over Bellakar was less favorable to their mercantile interests, and support for a *ʂuccesʂful* Tumakveh reconquest would certainly improve their economic position in the region. If Adûnuzîr showed himself *capable* of overthrowing the current rulers of Bellakar, he could count on the support of the Dar.

News of Imrathôr's courageous resistance and fall inspired Adûnuzîr to act at once, but Zimrathôr warned him against this. "My king," he said, "if we attack now, while the Tedjin are strong, we will surely be defeated. We must first send spies to find out how matters stand in Bellakar, and then wait for the *kataj* to lower his guard. In the meantime, you must learn the Tedjin ways of war. Remember the Field of Black Death! Do not repeat the mistakes of Artârik an-Aranî." Adûnuzîr, bowing to the wisdom of his counselor, restrained his desire for vengeance, and following his advice, sent many spies into Bellakar in the spring of 895.

In addition to gathering information on the disposition of Tedjin forces and the organization of Joam-Tuv's realm, Adûnuzîr's spies made cautious contact with his father's former subjects, testing which were loyal and identifying those whose allegiance had become compromised. In this way the exiled king learned that the Batân an-Izindi had not perished with Imrathôr and his followers on Urud an-Khibil. On the contrary, their example had stirred and rekindled the will of many Bellakaranî to carry on the resistance in secret. The knowledge that the Tumakveh line lived on in exile and was preparing to strike a mighty blow against the Tedjin fired their hearts all the more. When the time for attack came, eight years later, several pockets of Bellakarian resistance were ready to give organized support to their king.

THE RECONQUEST OF THE SOUTH (TA 902-910)

Late in 902, a political conflict between the *ðjaian* of Narîkzadan and Hazaj Tollin momentarily drew Tedjin attentions away from southern Bellakar, giving Adûnuzîr the opportunity he had awaited for more than a decade. Sending out secret summons to his loyalists and allies, the king began gathering his forces in winter quarters between Taôch and Refina. Though few as yet came from the Dar (apart from small, private companies sent by Adûnuzîr's staunchest supporters among the Katedrala), the Tumakveh ship-captains had recruited large numbers of mercenaries and adventurers from the coast of Tulwang eager for spoils. All told, the turnout was greater than Adûnuzîr had expected, much to his satisfaction.

"Tumakveh warriors!" Adûnuzîr addressed them, "Now is the time we have long awaited, the hour when the Tedjin shall be driven from Bellakar! We shall succeed." To his wife, Abârinzil, the king said: "Protect our son, Arphazân, and if I do not return, teach him all that I have learned. Though now tender in years, a time will come when he will be needed."

On 28 Najam, 903, Adûnuzîr launched a surprise attack on Târik an-Narduvî, overwhelming the city's outnumbered Tedjin garrison by a combined land and sea attack. Adûnuzîr owed much of his success to a well-timed outbreak of revolt within the city itself. The *ðjai* and his followers were killed without mercy, and the gates were flung open to receive his liberating army.

All were astonished to behold this unknown captain, bearing the Tumakveh symbols. "You do not dream," said the king, "It is I, Adûnuzîr son of Êruzagar the Warmaker. We shall drive these accursed Tedjin out of Bellakar. Will you follow us?" To this the delegates of the Bellakaranî replied: "Every warrior in the city will help our king in this noble war."

Adûnuzîr's dramatic success at Târik an-Narduvî persuaded the Katedrala to back the Tumakveh cause. Its House of Warcraft authorized a detachment of Visi to serve as bodyguards for the Tumakveh, while glory-hunting Gusar clansmen marshaled a host of mounted archers to match the bows of the Tedjin. Even the Diet of Tresti sent forth a hundred warriors of Junast's Guard to avenge Tedjin desecration of Ladnoca's shrines.

With the Forest Coast now secured by flanking Bozishnara land forces, Adûnuzîr advanced with his fleet against the old Korlean territory: first Balkuzôr and Esmer, then Korlea itself. Several pitched sea-battles were fought with Sorijan ships, but the captains of Tulwang had the advantage of both numbers and skill. Adûnuzîr had struck before the Sorija of Mardruak and the Felayja could strengthen the squadrons of the southern *ðjaian*, and those that were present were unused to large-scale naval engagements, being better skilled in hit-and-run piratical tactics.

With every new siege of a Tedjin-held city or town, the fate of Târik an-Narduvî was repeated. Everywhere, the Tumakveh army, and particularly its king, were welcomed by the populace. Within a year, the *ðjaian* and their Tedjin overlords were compelled to abandon all of southern Bellakar. Overhasty attempts by the aging Joam-Tuv to recover his losses were swiftly repulsed by the unforeseen arrival of large companies of Gusar cavalry among Adûnuzîr's allies. Enraged at this reversal, Joam-Tuv never lost his wits and sense. He ordered his forces to withdraw to Nîlûlondê and Ûrêzâyan, and gave commands for the key routes into Qadjajar to be fortified in preparation for a concerted assault by his enemies.

Meanwhile, Adûnuzîr consolidated his hold over the south, officially proclaiming his kingship in the autumn of 905 at Korlea (where he had conveyed his wife and son for their safekeeping). Adûnuzîr restored the old governmental institutions, including the Bâitha'n-Kadîr with its *ʂapthubêthî*. The first of these new councilors was Abâruzôr of Korlea. Born just a few years prior to the invasion, Abâruzôr had devoted his life to fostering resistance against the Tedjin, having lost his family to the invaders in the early years of the occupation. Surnamed the Tactician, Abâruzôr formed a secret society, the Free Sharks, which was responsible for many Tedjin disappearances in the marshes near Korlea. Abâruzôr's Sharks were also responsible for the Korlean uprising at the time of the city's liberation by Adûnuzîr.

With the help of people like Abâruzôr, the king vigorously rooted out and executed all who had been Tedjin sympathizers, and destroyed all barbarian fanes that could be found, forbidding any to pay worship to the "Shadow-cults of the Easterling." The adherents of the Batân an-Izindi were shown favor by the king, and he urged them to continue to render him all aid in his next task: the recapture of his ancestral capital—the birthplace of the goddess—and the purification of the Izindutârik of its defilements.

Adûnuzîr's noble piety also contained a sober strategic objective: to lure the *kataj* into an engagement near mountainous terrain where the full strength of the Tedjin cavalry could not be deployed, thus evening the odds. Heeding Zimrathôr's counsel, Adûnuzîr achieved this stratagem in the following way. Marching north from Korlea at full strength, as though purposing to force a

battle at the passes traversing the Urîd an-Abâr, Adûnuzîr unexpectedly divided his forces, sending ahead the Gusar cavalry to form a protective screen while he led the main host westward towards the headwaters of the Lôkhurush.

As Joam-Tuv beheld this abrupt change of movement from the mountain pass, it seemed to the *kataj* that his enemies were retreating—no doubt terrified at the greatness of his army! Exultant, the Easterling addressed his hordes: "See how these Bellakarian dogs flee before our face! Once again we shall show them and all the cursed rebels of this land how we Tedjin got our name."

Confronted with the Easterling onslaught, the renowned Gusar warriors broke formation and allowed themselves to be scattered across the plain, feigning flight. Duped by this Bozishnara stagecraft, and anxious to meet the son of Êruzagar in battle, the *kataj* prevented his Tedjin from pursuing the routed Gusar, dispatching the Qarsag for this task, while he pressed onward against the fugitive Tumakveh.

Joam-Tuv had taken the bait. No sooner than the Tedjin were out of sight, the Gusar turned their horses round to face their renegade countrymen. Riding circles round the Qarsag lancers, the fierce clansmen the Brij-Mijesec closed in for the kill, launching a hail of deadly arrows into the trapped foe. By nightfall, no living Qarsag remained upon the Vale of Lôkhurush. Pushing their tireless steeds on through the night, morning found the Gusar hot on the heels of the Tedjin horde. But obedient to Adûnuzîr's instructions, the horsemen reined in their battle-fury and refrained from attacking the Tedjin rear until the Tumakveh had sprung the trap.

On 15 Ishat, 906, the morning of the third day of his withdrawal, Adûnuzîr halted on the narrow plain wedged between the swift headwaters of the Lôkhurush and the precipitous slopes of the Urîd an-Abâr. Deeming his prey cornered, and undeterred by the terrain, the Tedjin hunter divided his forces, advancing with picked cavalry columns into the angle of land that guarded the enemy's flanks. Once those in the Tedjin van were separated from the main host, Adûnuzîr gave orders for a beacon-fire to be lit, signaling the Gusar to shatter the barbarian ranks from behind. By the time Joam-Tuv heard the cries from his rear guard it was too late to alter the disposition of his forces. He had only one hope: to fight until death.

Meeting the Tumakveh charge, the *kataj* now faced Adûnuzîr blade-to-blade. "Come, Tedjin! Defend your life," Adûnuzîr taunted, "for I will not allow you to leave this field alive." Wroth with rage, Joam rode and bore down upon the son of the Warmaker with savage fury. But Adûnuzîr received his onset and was not daunted, and with the force of his shield the Tumakveh king unhorsed the Tedjin chieftain. Then, raising his sword, Adûnuzîr shouted: "Dishonorer of my father! You thought that you hunted dogs. But lo! instead you are like the craven jackal that has stumbled upon a den of lions and was devoured, and the vultures shall feast on what the lions have left behind. Good sojourn in hell." Without hesitation, Adûnuzîr then slew Joam-Tuv; and there Joam's unburied corpse remained as food for the carrion, as Adûnuzîr had foretold.

Pushing forward his advantage, Adûnuzîr's powerful army besieged Nîlûlondê in 17 Vatrul 906. The task would not be an easy one. Even without the leadership of their *kataj*, the Tedjin held the strongest citadel in Bellakar. Because its defenders also held most of Nîlûlondê's oasis as well, the Bellakaranî and their allies, deprived of an immediate source of foraging and water, were unable to sustain a prolonged attack on the city itself. Instead they were forced to establish control first over the upper Sîres valley and the neighboring oases of Ayal Koyren. The latter would be perilous to hold, however, since they lay on the frontiers of Tedjin-controlled Qadjajar.

Only after two campaigning seasons was Adûnuzîr able to take and hold these positions; but once they were in his power, the day that would wipe away the shame of his flight from his father's side could not be long postponed. Refusing to allow the Tedjin or his own troops a respite, Adûnuzîr prosecuted the siege late into the year. Not expecting such ferocity even from a Tumakveh, the defenders found themselves unprepared. After three uninterrupted months of siege, the walls were breached and the Tedjin with their Qarsag allies were massacred.

But not without a high price in Bellakarian dead. Adûnuzîr's reckless prolongation of the campaign of 908 had stretched his army's endurance beyond its limit, and with Ladnoca's birthplace liberated from the Poganin, Adûnuzîr's Bozishnara allies refused to spend their lives for the Tumakveh cause. They agreed to leave garrisons along the Batân an-Sakal as far as Esmer, but would not march on Qadjajar. Bowing to necessity, Adûnuzîr remained in Nîlûlondê with the remnants of his army, giving them rest from their toils.

Two years later, the young Prince Arphazân had assembled a Bellakarian fleet, and without consulting his father launched a sea-attack against Ûrêzâyan, seeking to free Bellazen from Sorijan harassment. Arphazân triumphed over the Sorija of Ûrêzâyan in a brief naval campaign that lasted less than a month, supported by a small Tumakveh land force dispatched by his perturbed father from Ayal Koyren. It was Arphazân's first experience of war against the Tedjin, but he was well-advised Abâruzôr the Tactician, *asapthubêth* of Korlea.

Adûnuzîr was indignant at his son's actions, deeming it too soon to hurl themselves headlong into a war in Qadjajar, and commanded Arphazân to return to Korlea, leaving a garrison to hold Ûrêzâyan. Still, the success of Arphazân's bold venture meant that the Tumakveh now held both inroads of invasion to Qadjajar. But invasion could wait.

With the withdrawal of the Bozishnara allies, southern Bellakar lacked the strength needed to dislodge the Tedjin from the north. The needs of political and economic reconstruction in southern Bellakar cried out with great urgency. Thus, in spite of Nîlûlondê's liberation, Korlea remained Adûnuzîr's capital. Of equal importance to Adûnuzîr was the task of purifying the Izindutârik of its desecration. A few weeks after declaring the cessation of war, on the anniversary of Êruzagar's death (22 Tamun), the king cleansed the hallow, resuming the Kâthasaptha. A powerful link to the past had been restored, but what would the future hold?

THE QADJAJAR STALEMATE (TA 910-938)

While Adûnuzîr and his son labored to heal their broken kingdom in the south, the Tedjin of Qadjajar were distracted by a succession conflict among the surviving sons of Joam-Tuv. Although brief and relatively bloodless (by Tedjin standards), the nominal victor of the struggle, Joam's third son Kator, was unable to thrust his ambitious younger brother Ogtaï from the power he exercised over the Tedjin chieftains and Qarsag *djaian* of Mardruak. The result was an uneasy truce that (fortunately for the Tumakveh) thwarted any immediate Tedjin counter-invasion of the south.

It was not that Joam-Kator could not count on his Mardruak subjects to follow his banner should he call for war; it was rather the fear that, once in the field, Ogtaï's supporters might turn against him at a crucial moment—or worse, attempt to outmatch him in victories on the battlefield, thus casting further doubt upon his worthiness to lead the Tedjin. Accordingly, both the Tedjin and the Tumakveh had reached a stalemate which neither could risk breaking through a challenge to open war. Only a severe crisis in the domestic situation of one antagonist would tip the bal-

ance in favor of the other.

At the time of Ûrêzâyan's capture by Arphazân in 910, both sides were content to wait upon chance to offer them the opportunity they desired. Neither were secure enough in their own lands at this stage to contemplate a serious offensive in any case. Because the Tumakveh held all land routes through the Urîd an-Abâr, any small-scale warfare that did take place would have to be by sea, and indeed the stalemate created ideal conditions for Sorijan impudence against Bellazen (though none of the Sorija were so bold as to venture into the Bay of Tulwang). For this reason Ûrêzâyan became a major naval stronghold for the Tumakveh. In the generation that followed, its valiant marines took part in countless forays along the Felayjan and Mardruak coasts.

But as the years dragged on and no turn of events likely to break the impasse presented itself, both Joam-Kator and the Tumakveh grew impatient. As warlord of a warlike people, military inactivity was almost as dangerous for the stability of Joam's regime as defeat in battle, especially with a belligerent like Ogtaï to contend with. Enviously looking on as their half-breed Sorijan subjects returned to haven daily with the spoils of maritime victories, the land-bound Tedjin horsemen chafed for a fight.

For the Tumakveh the problem was the reverse: complacency. Though ever fearful of the barbarian realm on their northern borders and desirous of its extinction, many Bellakaranî in the south grew content with their relative security under the Tumakveh and became less eager to risk everything in an uncertain campaign far from their homes. Attitudes were otherwise in Nîlûlondê and on the coast of Bellazen, but theirs was not the voice of the majority. Adûnuzîr and his son certainly regarded it as their duty to liberate the north, but time was now their enemy.

No longer trusting to the whim of chance, but still unwilling or unable to commit themselves to open war, Joam and Adûnuzîr undertook to disrupt one another's realms through subversion. Spies were sent, from Adûnuzîr to foster resistance among the Bellakaze of Qadjajar, from the *kataj* to blunt the will of the Bellakaranî for war.

The minions of Joam-Kator were for the most part of Qarsag extraction. (Easterling warriors masquerading as Tumakveh subjects would have fooled no one.) Their principal sphere of activity was Bellazen, where the hearts of villagers and townsfolk of the coastlands, ever exposed to the shifting vicissitudes of seaborne raids, might be turned to revolt (or at least turn a cold shoulder) against their would-be Tumakveh protectors in Ûrêzâyan. Their successes were limited, but so were attempts by their Bellakarian counterparts to sway the loyalties of the Sorijan-held towns. The consequences of failure were too dangerous for most coastal folk to allow themselves to become pawns of a power which, however benign its promises, could not guarantee their protection against the local garrison—Tumakveh or Tedjin.

Only in the larger coastal cities of Qadjajar—Hazaj Tollin and Narîk-zadan; Joam itself was too risky—did Adûnuzîr's spies meet with more enduring results sent also spies into Qadjajar. Here, in the centers of Tedjin power, the oppression of the *kataj* was felt more keenly. The urban landscape afforded greater opportunities for concealment, and only a few of the cautious Tumakveh spies were taken alive by the authorities. Local acts of resistance—anonymous attacks on the city guard, assassination of Bellakaze "collaborators," despoilment of granaries and redistribution of food to the wretched, burning of Sorijan ships in haven—these were the sorts of things that might be achieved under Tedjin rule. They were a source of hope to a subjugated people and an annoyance to their rulers, but little more than that.

And so the game continued, for nearly three decades, without any sign of the impasse being broken, until 938. In autumn of that year, to the horror of all, Adûnuzîr was murdered in Korlea by a Qarsag assassin. The news came as a shock even to Joam-Kator, for the hand of the assassin had not been guided by his will. Indeed, the *kataj* was incensed at the deed, depriving him as it did of exacting vengeance on his father's slayer in battle. But the slight came with this blessing: Adûnuzîr's death would throw the Tumakveh realm into disarray. The time to break the stalemate had come.

THE BATTLE OF AYAL KOYREN (TA 938)

What the *kataj* did not know as he marshaled his Tedjin for war was that Adûnuzîr's assassination had not been the random act of a rogue agent. The murder had been ordered by Ogtaï his brother, and not out of any fraternal affection. By it, Ogtaï intended to lead Joam-Kator to his death and become *kataj* in his stead. By now adept at the espionage game, Ogtaï first learned from his spies in Joam's war council of his brother's battle plans, then arranged for this information to be divulged to Tumakveh spies well in advance of the conflict so that the Bellakaranî of the south would be able to anticipate and defeat the *kataj*.

Ogtaï's plot worked seamlessly. Hoping to repeat his father's victory on the Field of Black Death, Joam planned to engage the Tumakveh forces north of Nîlûlondê near the oasis of Ayal Koyren (an essential link in the Bellakarian line of defense along the northern slopes of the Urîd an-Abâr). By defeating the oasis' meager garrison in advance of the main Tumakveh host, Joam could occupy the high ground around the fertile vale, forcing his enemies to attack from an inferior position, just as they did before the River Tosith almost half a century ago. Unfortunately for Joam-Kator, this time the Bellakaranî had learned of his plans long before he could put them into effect.

Prince Arphazân had been overseeing the strengthening of Ûrêzâyan's fortifications when news of his father's death reached him. Sailing to Korlea with all speed, the prince wasted no time asserting his authority, knowing that any dissension over his succession and command of the army would play into Tedjin hands. Seeing to the execution of his father's murderer (whose interrogation repaid him with no more than spittle), Arphazân gave orders for Adûnuzîr's funeral.

During the ceremony, a weary messenger arrived in Korlea from the north, one of Adûnuzîr's spies. "I must speak with the king immediately," he said. But seeing his fallen lord being borne before him on a bier, the messenger bowed his head and corrected his words: "To the successor of the king, then." Led hastily to the prince, the spy revealed the plan of the *kataj*.

Casting off his robes of mourning, Arphazân sent word to Ûrêzâyan, commanding its captain to lead his forces to Ayal Koyren not by the Batân an-Sakal (which would be watched by the enemy) but by mountain paths through the Urîd an-Abâr, and so to come upon the vale of the oasis from the south, above and behind where Joam hoped to position his host. Meanwhile, he himself would mobilize the garrison of Nîlûlondê and with it march openly to meet the *kataj*. By this stratagem the prince hoped to catch Joam-Kator between the hammer and the anvil.

Joam divided the Tedjin hosts at Hazaj Tollin. Determined to prevent any treachery from his conniving brother, but knowing nothing of Arphazân's plans, the *kataj* commanded Ogtaï to follow him along the Batân an-Sakal as far as Kalz Yagup, there to hold the passage against the forces of Ûrêzâyan, while he pressed on eastward to Ayal Koyren. "Loyal warriors," cried Joam-Kator, addressing his and his brother's troops, "the Tumakveh have no king. And what can do a realm without a king? Nothing! The time has come to avenge the ghost of Joam-Tuv, Victor of the Field of Black Death!"

Following Arphazân's orders, the garrison of Ayal Koyren fled before the onset of the Tedjin host, withdrawing to Nîlûlondê without offering any battle. Convinced that their dispersion resulted from Bellakarian cowardice, Joam-Kator fell prey to the same deception that was his father's undoing. Only one grizzled old Tedjin veteran, a survivor of the disaster of the Lôkhurush vale, remarked forebodingly to the *kataj*: "When Bellakaranî run without a fight, beware."

Joam did not ignore this counsel, but neither did he change his plan, believing the deception (if there was one) to be the temptation to pursue the fugitive garrison into some ambush near Nîlûlondê where they would not have the advantage. Instead, the *kataj* trusted to the strength of ground that Ayal Koyren offered; but he also sent word to Ogtaï of what had befallen, bidding him to keep his host in readiness as a reserve force if needed. Ogtaï smiled when his brother's messengers reported these things to him, and sent the couriers back with assurances of his full cooperation.

So it happened that on 13 Sumat, 938, Prince Arphazân led his host to the foot of Ayal Koyren, Valley of a Thousand Streams, whose waters would soon be glutted with Tedjin blood. There he halted, challenging Joam-Kator to meet him upon the plain. These words caused Joam some consternation, since to decline might be taken as a sign of cowardice. But the *kataj* felt sure this would lead him into a trap, and shot back: "Come rather to us, if it be not an idle tale that the Bellakaranî put trust in the god of these mountains!"

"Your ears have heard no fable, Tedjin," retorted Arphazân, "and now you shall feel the bite of His mighty sword!" Then the prince ordered trumpets to be sounded, and at that signal warriors of Ûrêzâyan began pouring down from the heights above onto the startled Easterlings. At the same time Arphazân advanced with his own forces, closing off the avenues of escape.

Within minutes the battle was decided and the Tedjin rout began. To the east there was no escape, for Arphazân had stationed the Ayal Koyren garrison between that vale and Nîlûlondê, ready to cut down any fugitives. Only by striking westward did Joam have any hope of reaching his brother's forces. Then the *kataj* realized that flight to Ogtaï would mean death for him just as surely as if he remained—at least death in battle would render his memory honorable on the lips of his people. And so the son of Joam-Tuv met his end.

UNFINISHED CONQUESTS (TA 930-938)

With the *kataj* dead and half his army routed, Arphazân's soldiers were so elated that they would have marched on the Tedjin capital right then and there. The Tumakveh prince also greatly desired this, but he did not let his emotions get the better of him. He knew from the reports of his scouts that Ogtaï was lurking near Saraj with the rest of the Tedjin host, easily within striking distance of Ûrêzâyan and Bellazen. A false move now might cancel whatever victory had been won at Ayal Koyren.

Accordingly, Arphazân ordered the forces of Ûrêzâyan to return to their city by the same way they had come, avoiding the possibility of confrontation with Ogtaï until they were within the security of their own walls. The prince himself decided not to tempt fate at Saraj, but instead strengthened his garrison and fortifications at Ayal Koyren. There he remained, awaiting news of the Tedjin's movements.

As for Ogtaï, he had achieved his objective. When his spies reported to the Tedjin camp that Joam was dead, Ogtaï was immediately heralded as *kataj*. As reward for their loyalty, Ogtaï permitted his warriors to ravage the Felayjan countryside, but forbade them to lay siege to Ûrêzâyan. Ogtaï knew that if he moved his army too far south along the Batân an-Sakal, the Tumakveh prince might block his egress from the north, so that his army would have foes behind them and before them. It was an unnecessary risk. It was more important for Ogtaï to consolidate his rule back in Qadjajar, leaving behind strong forces to garrison the Felayja in preparation for the next round of the conflict.

That winter the new Tumakveh and Tedjin monarchs celebrated their accession in their respective capitals: Arphazân in Korlea and Ogtaï in Joam. Both events marked an incomplete victory for their celebrants. The Tumakveh had held their own and gained an important stepping stone for their northerly aspirations, but in the Felayja the enemy would have the advantage because of their superior naval strength on the Kalz Kalemej. Ogtaï meanwhile had returned triumphantly to Qadjajar as *kataj*, commemorating his installation with suitably bloody Tedjin pomp (a mass sacrifice of 250 Bellakaze taken in the Felayja and an equal number of his dead brother's former supporters, in honor of the ghost of Joam-Tuv).

But even Ogtaï's horizon was not entirely unclouded by troubles. While the rulers of Qadjajar and southern Bellakar had been frozen in a waiting game over the past decades, indifferent to events of the wider world, great matters were brewing on the Bay of Belfalas which by comparison made the life-and-death struggles of Bellakar seem like little more than a backwater land dispute. Umbar and Gondor had gone to war.

As spies and assassins supplanted cavalry and phalanx as the soldiery of Adûnuzîr and Joam-Kator's war of espionage, the Zâur an-Anî in Umbar had abandoned its cloaks and secret meetings for swords and spears. In 920, the inheritors of Zagarkhâd's legacy openly declared their tenets and mission before an embattled Council of Captains. Three years later they had gained enough supporters to seize control of the haven's fortress and rebuild its infernal temple to the Lord of the Dark. This act provoked violent strife among the various political factions within the city and its surrounding hinterland for the next ten years.

By 933, the Zâur an-Anî had mastery of Umbar's Bâitha and its fleet. But it was a short-lived victory; for not long afterwards, King Eärnil of Gondor, nephew and successor to Tarannon Falastur, stormed the city of the Ârûwanâi, sailing his armada into its haven, unopposed, by a deception. Their once-impregnable walls taken, their temple and its blasphemous altar cast down, the lords of Umbar had only two choices left to them: death without vengeance, or flight with the hope of one day redressing their calamity.

Most chose the latter, perceiving that even if their beloved city itself were held by the enemy, the coastlands of Umbar and the Bay of Belfalas could be long defended against Gondorian attack. Indeed, so long as they were masters of these lands and their many fortresses and walled towns, Umbar would be isolated from all Gondorian aid except by sea. Further, though they were exiled and their fleet scattered, the lords of Umbar still had many warships under their command, safely harbored in Dûsalan and Bellakar and southward across many leagues of land and sea, as far as the Thânî Hazad in farthest Harad.

The first task of the Ârûwanâ exiles was to canvass Haradwaith for allies in their struggle. Their most important source of aid came from the Jelut, nomads of the barren country between Umbar and the Dune Sea, who had served the King's Men as cavalry auxiliaries in the land wars of Tarannon's day. Under a new clan of charismatic leaders, the Muargiz, the Jelut could draw on many allies across the Harad, as far as Maresh in Lurmsakûn and Khibil Êphalak in the Auz Bekar. But some adherents of the Zâur an-Anî looked also southwards to Qadjajar, remembering Zagarkhâd's pact with the Tedjin.

Nûluzîr son of Zagarkhâd was one such exile. Escaping the capture of the haven, he sailed south along the coast to Dûsalan,

the traditional stronghold of his family, in 934. Thence he sent emissaries into Mardruak, testing the mood of its Tedjin chieftains and Qarsag *ðjaian*, and inquiring especially into the state of Qadjajar's fleet. By these probings Nûluzîr learned of the indecisive contest being played out by the *kataj* and his Tumakveh antagonists, and of Ogtaï's ambitions against his brother, and of the Tedjin yearning for war.

Like his father, Nûluzîr was a subtle man, well skilled to gain what he would by patient effort when no immediate solution presented itself. It was he who first encouraged Ogtaï to break the stalemate by Adûnuzîr's murder. But the son of Joam-Tuv was no mere sorcerer's tool. He spoke with diplomatic vagueness to Nûluzîr's envoys about the prospect of Qadjajar contributing to the "Southron Alliance" then being assembled by the Umbarean exiles, but the future *kataj* knew that he could not afford to send great numbers of his warriors a hundred leagues north and more to fight Gondorians while the Tumakveh threatened Qadjajar's Felayjan frontier.

Nûluzîr realized this too. But he did not believe, as had Zagarkhâd, that the Tumakveh were capable of posing a threat to an Umbarean war with Gondor, deeming them ineffectual beyond their own borders and irreparably estranged from the Elendili. Therefore Nûluzîr was not above subverting Ogtaï's subjects with temptations of marital glory and rich spoils to be had in his cause.

So it was that when Ogtaï celebrated his accession in Joam in the winter of 938, he found many of his people clamoring for him to lead them to glorious conquests in the north (or to give them leave to enter the service of Nûluzîr as mercenaries). But the *kataj* would have none of this, regarding all but those who counseled war with the Tumakveh as rebels against his rule. To emphasize this point, Ogtaï ordered a ruthless purge of all in his realm—*ðjai*, chieftain, warrior, peasant or merchant known to have received visitations from Dûsalan. In parody of Nûluzîr's cause, the *kataj* jokingly referred to those whom he had assigned the task of butchering these traitors the "Creed of Vultures."

THE FELAYJAN WAR (TA 939-951)

Spring of the next year (939) saw the commencement of the so-called Felayjan War, really a series of campaigns spanning more than a decade which focused on repeated attempts to control the Felayja, the 300-mile coastal strip between Ûrêzâyan and Hazaj Tollin. The strategic significance of this region lay in its capacity to serve as a rampart for an invading army bent on determined assault of the lands on either side of it. The challenge that the Tumakveh faced lay not so much in conquering the Felayjan coast from its Tedjin overlords as in *maintaining* possession of it once it had been won. It contained no great cities or easily defensible fastnesses, and so was constantly exposed to counter-attack by either land or sea.

Predictably, Arphazân's early Felayjan campaigns were thwarted by the Sorija. Arphazân had his own fleet, but it was not large enough to protect both the Felayja and Bellazen simultaneously. The *kataj* simply had more ships at his disposal. If Arphazân dispatched his fleet to screen and provision his land forces in the Felayja, the Sorija of Hazaj Tollin would harass them while the Sorija of Mardruak would simply sail past and attack undefended Bellazen, forcing the Tumakveh forces to abort their northward march.

But if the Tumakveh were defeated by the sea, the Tedjin were equally unable to make much headway on land. This, however, stemmed not from incompetence but from a lack of will on Ogtaï's part. The *kataj* was only too ready to engage Tumakveh forces on an open field where a means of escape was available. (He would *not* fall prey to the entrapment tactics that claimed the lives of his father and brother.) Ogtaï was also happy to let his warriors decimate defenseless coastal settlements (thereby making the Felayjan marches still more difficult for the Tumakveh to negotiate). But under no circumstances would the *kataj* attempt to re-take lost territory.

This was a source of annoyance to many of Ogtaï's followers, but Ogtaï remained intransigent. He was not willing to strain his already strained manpower further. The root of the problem was Nûluzîr, who continued to seduce the *kataj*'s Mardruak subjects to more promising military ventures based in Dûsalan. The *kataj*'s Vultures responded with brutal suppression, but this only worsened the problem, provoking armed rebellion in places where Tedjin settlers had not forgotten their martial traditions.

Ogtaï's slash and burn tactics, which became more and more frequent as his frustration with the Felayja grew, generated new complaints among his soldiery. The Tedjin eventually became bored of pillaging civilian settlements—a war without honor for them—and the Sorija grew hungry for more lucrative targets like Ûrêzâyan or even the southern coast of Bellakar on the Bay of Tulwang. Something had to give. If Ogtaï wanted his forces to fight, he would have to bow to their wishes and alter his strategy. Unfortunately, Ogtaï was in no mood to bend to anyone's will, being confronted on all sides with challenges to his authority.

By 951, tensions between the *kataj* and most of his subjects had reached the breaking point. Hazaj Tollin, Joam and all the Rôthurush vale remained loyal to Ogtaï, but Mardruak had become an unknown quantity. The Vultures he sent into Narîk-zadan, Nykkea and even the surrounding hill country were failing in their missions or not returning at all. Ogtaï contemplated marching into Mardruak to re-establish order, but could not do so without leaving his core territory vulnerable to Tumakveh attack. While Ogtaï wintered at Joam, wasting time debating with himself, the exasperated leaders of Mardruak decided to take matters into their own hands.

The chief among these discontents was Olug Kejar, the *ðjai* of Narîk-zadan. A Tedjin collaborator of Bellakaze origin, Olug was of a less ruthless character than most of the *kataj*'s governors. He showed toleration to his own people, defending their right to live among their conquerors (and not merely in poverty). If a sedition arose in his city (not an uncommon event under Ogtaï's harsh rule), Olug preferred to deal with the rebels by negotiation rather than force, offering them better consideration if they agreed to lay down their arms. This policy showed him to be a fair-minded administrator, as did his efforts to rescue many of his subjects—Bellakaze, Qarsag and Tedjin alike—from the talons of Ogtaï's Vultures.

Nevertheless, Olug Kejar remained loyal to his *kataj* throughout the Felayjan War, showing no interest in Nûluzîr's enticements, though he might have had great profit from collaboration with the Exiles in neighboring Dûsalan, scarcely thirty leagues north of his city. He permitted Umbarean ships to take have in Narîk-zadan, but forbade his Sorija to take up arms with the Ârûwanâi. The foresighted *ðjai* was determined to steer clear of the entanglements of war with Gondor, and certainly wanted to avoid antagonizing Ogtaï.

So long as the Sorijan fleets had the Felayja and the ships of the Tumakveh to plunder, they were content to obey the commands of their *ðjai*. But as the Felayjan War progressed and the pickings became slimmer, Olug perceived that the *kataj* was swiftly backing himself into a predicament which could only result in the disintegration of Qadjajar. The only choice left to the *ðjai* of Narîk-zadan was to determine how he would weather the coming storm: would he fall with Ogtaï's doomed regime, or preserve his own authority in spite of the ruin of the house of Joam-Tuv?

THE MARDRUAK EMBASSY (TA 951)

In the winter of 951, the eleventh year of the Felayjan War, a secret delegation sent by Olug Kejar was granted a guarded audience with King Arphazân in Korlea. Representing the three peoples of Qadjajar, the ambassadors included Djataï-Tajdor of Narîk-zadan (Olug Kejar's son), Haz-Ishtu (brother of Haz-Kajtor, the Sorijan *ðjai* of Nykkea) and Dashan-Jal (a Tedjin chieftain from the country round Sarnak Hor). Together they represented the coming generation of Mardruak's leaders.

Naming the son of Olug Kejar as their spokesman, they revealed to their old enemy the turmoil that was now seething in Qadjajar as a result of Ogtaï's unjust rule. Djataï-Tajdor said that their people would make common cause with the Tumakveh to overthrow this tyrant (whom they named the Bloodmaker) if Arphazân would forget his quarrel with them and leave Mardruak in peace. The Sorija of Nykkea and Narîk-zadan would allow the Bellakaranî to pass the Felayja unhindered, and Tedjin from Sarnak Hor would provide them with guides to assist in the overthrow of Joam and Hazaj Tollin.

Arphazân listened to these words with great suspicion, but perceived that they were spoken in earnest. The prospect of marching unopposed to Ogtaï's doorstep was a tempting one, weary as he was with so many years of inconclusive skirmishing in the Felayja. Nevertheless, the Tumakveh king would drive a hard bargain.

"As for your offer to aid us in the overthrow of Ogtaï the Bloodmaker," answered Arphazân, "it is accepted, provided that you three remain at my side as hostages for the safekeeping of your oaths. But even should we succeed in our purpose, such aid as you now promise shall not avail to redress three score years and seven of wrongful oppression of my people by lords of alien race or by those who have chosen to serve them. Mardruak belongs to the Bellakaranî, and I am their rightful lord."

At this the heart of Djataï-Tajdor grew hot, and he spoke out in bitterness: "So fair and noble is it to speak thus, secure upon your throne, two hundred leagues and more from this land that you claim as your own! But answer me this, Tumakveh: who has cared for the folk of Mardruak through all those years while you and your father and his father before him lifted never a finger on their behalf, for all your high-mindedness? Who has risked all in seeking your goodwill, hoping to find an ally worthier of faith than the house of Joam-Tuv? Mardruak belongs to the Bellakaranî, you say. What, then, are we? Does not Bellakaze blood flow in my veins, as it does in the kinsman of Haz-Kajtor—yea, even in Dashan-Jal, whose folk have tilled Bellakarian soil since the days of their fathers' fathers?"

Many who heard these words took offense at Djataï-Tajdor's words, reviling them as the effrontery of a Tedjin slave who knew not whereof he spoke. But the king lifted his hand, silencing the confusion of angry voices, and rose from his throne. "You speak with a true tongue, son of Olug Kejar," answered Arphazân gravely, "and your words are like swords to my heart; for they bring just judgement against my house. Indeed, the Tumakveh have failed their people in Qadjajar, awaiting an hour that would never come, while they suffered." A silence followed, and those who had cast aspersions upon Djataï-Tajdor now bowed their heads in shame.

"But you have named the hour," said the king at last, "and your voice has been heard. The last son of Joam-Tuv shall die by my sword. Thus shall the people of Qadjajar be avenged and the stain on my family's honor be removed. So do I swear." Then Arphazân dismissed the emissaries, saying: "Go now. Bring our reply back to your people, and let them prepare for war with Ogtaï Bloodmaker. When he lies dead the walls of Joam are razed to the ground, then we shall discuss terms of peace between Bellakar and Mardruak."

THE END OF TEDJIN RULE (TA 952)

In spring of the next year (952) a Bellakarian army led by Arphazân marched out from the gates of Ûrêzâyan and advanced through a desolate Felayja along the Batân an-Sakal, provisioned and shielded by the Tumakveh fleet under the command of the king's son, Prince Narkuzîr. The *kataj*, fully apprised of this by his scouts, commanded his Sorijan fleets to intercept and repel the enemy, as they had done almost annually for the past decade.

And so it seemed that they would do so again, until the ships of Mardruak suddenly turned against their comrades from Hazaj Tollin, driving them back to haven and blockading its harbor. Furious at this betrayal, Ogtaï summoned the Tedjin to Joam, whence he prepared to ride and meet the Tumakveh land forces before the crossed the River Tosith. In this too, the *kataj* reaped the fruits of his wickedness; for as his hordes were being marshaled in the Rôthurush vale, they were attacked by Tedjin out of Sarnak Hor led by the kinsmen of Dashan-Jal.

Though still greatly outmatched by those loyal to Ogtaï, the rebel Tedjin succeeded in throwing the *kataj*'s ranks into disarray, threatening to harass them further if they sought to advance far from Joam. By the time Ogtaï was able to restore order to his forces, the Bellakaranî had already reached the walls of Hazaj Tollin and had commenced its siege. Faced with a union of foes greater than he had imagined possible, the embattled *kataj* desperately turned to the only possible source of help left to him: Nûluzîr of Dûsalan.

But even the son of Zagarkhâd would not lend aid to Ogtaï Bloodmaker. On the contrary, when Nûluzîr learned of what had befallen in Qadjajar, he cast in his lot with the enemies of the *kataj*, hoping that fall of Joam's house would woo greater numbers into his camp. Nûluzîr's Tedjin allies soon joined the rebels of Sarnak Hor in the Rôthurush valley, preventing Ogtaï from marching against the Tumakveh. Meanwhile, some six weeks after the siege of Hazaj Tollin had begun, Umbarean exiles who had been taking haven there when the Sorijan blockade was established, seeing how matters were going, conspired to betray the city to the besiegers, attacking the garrison of the main gate from within.

As a demonstration of his solidarity with the victims of the Bloodmaker, Arphazân dealt harshly with Ogtaï's supporters once the city had been secured. The *kataj*'s Vultures were summarily executed before a public tribunal, and the *ðjai* of the city was compelled to take his own life. The Sorija he pardoned, trusting that they would bend with the political wind like their brethren in Mardruak, but ordered the fleet of Hazaj Tollin demobilized until the war was over. Arphazân thanked the Umbareans for their timely assistance, and allowed them to stay or depart in peace as they would.

Leaving the great port in the hands of his son, the king advanced with his land forces alongside the Rôthurush river until he beheld the walls of Joam. There Arphazân found the rebel Tedjin already busy with its siege and promptly joined in. But when Dashan-Jal explained to the Tumakveh that many of those conducting the siege were not of Sarnak Hor but had come at Nûluzîr's behest, Arphazân was dismayed.

The king wanted no traffic with any who served an Advocate of the Zâur an-Anî —even as mercenary allies; but he could not risk dissension among the besiegers. Not only would that play into Ogtaï's hands; Nûluzîr's Tedjin (mostly from Zimrênzil) were numerous, and might prove a still deadlier foe outside the walls of Joam than the *kataj* within, if they were provoked. Also, Ar-

phazân remembered his vow to Djataï-Tajdor, who stood nearby him as his hostage: that Ogtaï the Bloodmaker would die by his sword. That could not be, if the king now abandoned the siege because of the company. He beat down his pride, and kept his gaze trained on the goal.

Arphazân had not long to wait. Though a mighty fortress, Joam had not store of provisions sufficient to feed the numbers that had been cooped up within it by the rebels. Long before its defenses were breached, the *kataj* would be forced to break the siege or die of hunger within. The besiegers knew this, and arranged their camps to force the sortie that must soon come from the gates into a narrow field beside the Rôthurush—even as Arphazân's father Adûnuzîr had trapped Joam-Tuv in the Urîd an-Abâr many years ago.

Ogtaï Bloodmaker, last *kataj* of the house of Joam, rode forth from his gates at the head of a grim Tedjin host at dawn on 28 Ishat, 952, prepared to die and to deal death. The waters of the Rôthurush turned to wine that day—red wine—and the grass of its vale glistened with death at the sun's rising, as a slaughter of indescribable brutality followed. Tedjin slew Tedjin, Bellakaranî slew Tedjin, and Ogtaï slew both. But the besiegers had the day, as the *kataj*'s horsemen were driven against the river and their charge thrown into disorder. Companies of Sorijan archers, brought up from Hazaj Tollin by Arphazân, completed the carnage.

But Ogtaï and his Vultures were spared to the last at Arphazân's command, and when they alone remained to threaten the field, a ring was formed around them and the Tumakveh king rode into its midst, dismounting from his horse and challenging the *kataj* to single combat.

"Remember the fate of Êruzagar the Warmaker," cried Arphazân. "He was denied a last battle against your father Joam-Tuv. On the slopes of the Urîd an-Abâr, my father avenged his death. But today a greater reckoning awaits you, Bloodmaker; in peace you have slain more than all your ancestors ever did in war. Even your own Tedjin revolt against you for shame. The ghosts of all you have wronged—Tedjin, Qarsag, Sorija and Bellakaze—summon me to appease them. That prayer I shall fulfill, so that all in Bellakar and Qadjajar may know by what manner of justice the Tumakveh rule their realm. Come forth! If I die, you may depart this field alive, but you may never leave Bellakar so long as you live—and that may not be long, judging from the number of friends you have made under your rule."

All who heard Arphazân's challenge—even the Tedjin—were amazed. The Bellakaranî quailed; for Ogtaï was a warrior of great renown. Never again would any man of Tedjin blood dare to accuse the Tumakveh of cowardice. But the *kataj* was fey of mood, and gave no heed to those around him. He dismounted and advanced to slay Arphazân, sword in hand.

Like a wild beast Ogtaï fought, lashing out at the king with mighty strokes that would have felled many a warrior, but Arphazân maintained his composure, nimbly deflecting the Tedjin's blows. Then, as the Bloodmaker off-balanced himself with yet another swing, the grandson of Êruzagar the Warmaker thrust his blade deep into the *kataj*'s breast and cried: "Your line is at an end, Tedjin!" And with those words and that thrust, the Tedjin yoke was lifted from Bellakar forever.

THE TERMS OF ARPHAZÂN (TA 952-957)

Soon after Ogtaï's death, the defenses of Joam were breached, its inhabitants mercilessly slaughtered, its walls razed and its buildings put to the torch. The rebels of Mardruak returned to their homes and Arphazân released the hostages, bidding them seek him in Nîlûlondê after the harvest to hear his terms of peace. The Tumakveh king then led his army back to Hazaj Tollin, whose affairs Narkuzîr his son had set in order during his absence.

There Arphazân addressed the Sorija, offering them service in his navy if they would swear fealty to his house, but giving them leave to depart freely from his realm (without their ships) if such allegiance was not to their liking. Many of the Sorija marveled to hear the king's generous offer, fearing that he would exact harsh punishment on them for the injuries they had done to Bellakar under the Tedjin.

Most accepted Arphazân's invitation, and remained at Hazaj Tollin. But one there was, Lojnar, who gathered many Sorija to him and, under cover of night, seized many ships and drew them away before the Tumakveh garrison could prevent their egress. Lojnar was the son of the *ðjai* of Hazaj Tollin, whom Arphazân had compelled to commit suicide at the taking of the city. For this reason he hated the Tumakveh, naming all who served them traitors and turncoats. Lojnar's Sorija fled west, ravaging the coast of Mardruak as they went, until they came to Dûsalan, and there they found welcome.

Meanwhile, Arphazân returned with his army to southern Bellakar, leaving Narkuzîr to oversee the re-ordering of the Felayja. After disbanding his forces, the Tumakveh announced that he would at last move his seat back to Nîlûlondê, the city of his ancestors. The king entered its gates on 22 Tamun, 952, the sixty-third anniversary of its fall to the Tedjin. And he spoke words to his people, recalling the courage of Êruzagar his grandfather, and prophesying that Nîlûlondê would never again fall to an invader. The 28th of Ishat Arphazân instituted as a day of festival, commemorating the fall of Joam and the restoration of his kingdom.

Yet not all was pomp and celebration. The matter of Mardruak weighed heavily upon the king's thoughts. Many of its leaders had proven their goodwill towards him, and but for their help he could not have defeated Ogtaï and recovered the Felayja. But not all in Mardruak were to be trusted. Many Tedjin looked to Dûsalan as an ally and employer, and now there were Lojnar's Sorija to consider. For all the strength of Arphazân's new allies, neither he nor they had the power to assail the coasts of the Ârûwanâi that lay beyond Narîk-zadan. When the ambassadors of Mardruak arrived in Nîlûlondê in the autumn of that year, therefore, the Tumakveh had to strike a careful balance between asserting his claims as King of Bellakar and recognizing the *de facto* autonomy of his newfound friends.

The same envoys headed the delegation as before: Djataï-Tajdor of Narîk-zadan, Haz-Ishtu of Nykkea and Dashan-Jal of Sarnak Hor. To these Arphazân said: "The Cape of Mardruak has been Bellakarian land since days of old, and from the time of Zimrêbal my ancestor, its people have owned the Tumakveh as lords. This land the house of Joam-Tuv seized and ruled unjustly. Now the house of Joam-Tuv is no more, and I, Arphazân, son of Adûnuzîr, son of Êruzagar the Warmaker, hereby renew my house's claim upon it. If you would have peace between Mardruak and the south, you must acknowledge my suzerainty."

Then Djataï-Tajdor spoke: "By what terms would you exercise this suzerainty, Arphazân Tumakveh?" The king answered him with the following conditions:

- "All Tedjin, Qarsag and Sorija who acknowledge me and abide by my laws may dwell in Mardruak on equal terms with the Bellakaranî, recognizing them as brothers. But the Bellakaranî have suffered under the Tedjin yoke—they have been deprived unjustly of their lands and their rights, and many have been injured or slain without cause. Reparation, fair and fitting, must be made to them, paid out of their own property, the amount to be determined by assessors appointed and sent by me.
- "The freedom of the Bellakaranî shall include the liberty, denied them under the house of Joam-Tuv, to openly declare their devotion to the One, whether by the Kâthasaptha or the Batân an-Izindi, as their conscience dictates. The cults of the Bozishnarod

shall also be freely practiced in Mardruak, as they are in Bellazen and the Felayja. But the gods of the Tedjin, whose followers profaned the holy places of Êru and the Balâi in the days of Joam-Tuv, shall be neither named nor worshipped on Bellakarian soil. Any found in violation of this law shall be called rebels, and must be delivered to us for execution. The same interdict applies to those who follow the Zâur an-Anî or take service with any who name Mulkhêr lord."

- "Mardruak shall be governed according to the precepts of the Bâitha'n-Kadîr and subject to its judgement. No other form of political organization shall be recognized. All Tedjin clans shall be dissolved and their members beholden to one of the Kadîr. All Kadîr of Mardruak may retain their present leaders, provided that these have committed no wrong against the Bellakaranî under Tedjin rule. But all garrisons shall disband and be replaced by Bellakarian garrisons of my choosing. In the hereafter, however, these garrisons shall not be closed to men of Tedjin, Qarsag or Sorijan birth."

To some of his counselors, Arphazân's terms seemed excessive (though hardly undeserved). In particular, it was feared that the king's demand for the dissolution of the Tedjin clans would succeed only in driving more of them into Nûluzîr's camp. But the Tumakveh knew from private conversations with Dashan-Jal that many Tedjin of the Mardruak coast had long since become assimilated in their cults and social organization to those of the Qarsag or Bellanarod. To these, Arphazân's terms would not appear disruptive; indeed, they would validate their traditions. On the other hand, the decisive tone of the king's strictures would force the Tedjin of the hinterland to decide which side of the new political fence they would stand on.

The terms were accepted by all three ambassadors. Arphazân recognized Haz-Kajtor as the lord of Nykkea and joined the lands of Dashan-Jal's people to that city's territory. The king would have confirmed Olug Kejar as Narîk-zadan's ruler, but the venerable *ðjai* insisted that this honor be bestowed upon his son, Djataï-Tajdor, through whose labors peace with the Tumakveh had been achieved. To symbolize the restoration of his city to Bellakar, Djataï abandoned his Tedjin name for *Ârûzôr*, "He who obeys the King."

The reincorporating Nykkea and Narîk-zadan into the Bâitha'n-Kadîr did not happen overnight. The determination and supervision of the "reparations" owed to the Bellakaze and Bellanarod by their neighbors proved a slow and often painful process that kept the king's officials busy for five years in Narîk-zadan and still longer in Nykkea. The exactions condemned many to penury and want, and some spoke bitterly that their leaders had betrayed them to a new brood of vultures.

But there were few acts of defiance among the already impoverished populace of the coastal regions. They had suffered under the house of Joam-Tuv, and they would continue to suffer under Tumakveh hegemony. Their leaders assured them that their present condition was eminently preferable to the rule of Ogtaï the Bloodmaker—and with this all agreed—but that did not make the redistribution of wealth much pleasanter to those who were on the losing end.

Violent opposition was confined to the Tedjin horse-clans of the interior, concentrated in the vicinity of Zimrênzil, who now regarded their complacent kinsfolk as strangers to be plundered. While persistent, the marauders were not strong enough to threaten the walls of Narîk-zadan or Nykkea, but they did cause damage to the countryside. The curtailment of these raids was the main task of the new Bellakarian garrisons of Mardruak, and they received substantial assistance from Prince Narkuzîr in Hazaj Tollin.

In 954, the conjoint armies of Mardruak and the Felayja succeeded in capturing Zimrênzil from the belligerent Tedjin. Lacking forces sufficient to occupy so distant an outpost, Narkuzîr had no alternative but to demolish the once beautiful Tumakveh city so that it could not be used again by the enemy—thus earning himself the sobriquet *Ervak*, "the Destroyer." But this victory did not put an end to the Tedjin threat to Mardruak. So long as the Zâur an-Anî held Dûsalan, the enemies of Bellakar would have a powerful stronghold in the north.

THE SORIJAN MENACE (TA 957-986)

The re-integration of Narîk-zadan into the Bâitha was completed in 957, followed two years later by Nykkea. The lords of Mardruak now ruled a coastline that stretched a hundred leagues from east to west, commanding a strategic arm of the sea-route between the Bay of Belfalas in the north and the Azra'm-Miraz in the south. This held out the promise of future wealth from a revived maritime trade (which proceeded apace in spite of the investiture of Umbar by its exiled lords and their Southron allies). On the other hand, it made Mardruak a tempting prize for the Ârûwanâi and other disenfranchised elements in the region.

Chief among these were the Sorija—both the renegades who followed Lojnar and those who lived under the new regime in Mardruak itself. Although the Tumakveh could afford to feed and pay a moderately sized naval force at Hazaj Tollin, they lacked the resources to subsidize the glutted fleets of Nykkea and Narîk-zadan, leaving the lords of those cities to their own devices. Suffering from even more acute financial problems than the Tumakveh, Haz-Kajtor and Ârûzôr attempted to assuage this problem by discharging many veteran Sorija and settling them along the coast to help guard its waters.

Unfortunately, none of these solutions addressed the root of the Sorijan problem; namely, the hard truth that for the past half century the *katajan* had allowed their governors to build up a navy whose existence and well-being depended on constant raiding. So long as Bellazen and the Felayja were hostile coasts, the Sorija of Mardruak prospered. Now that those coasts were closed to them and their new leaders could neither support them nor, because of Tumakveh policy, offer them any alternative object of plunder, the Sorija were forced to rely on their own devices to survive.

This meant piracy, often conducted under the veil of official "policing" operations. Occasionally the targets of such activities were other Sorija—Lojnar's corsairs from Dûsalan. But as yet these did not often venture into Bellakarian waters; Lojnar's attentions were turned northward, where the war with Gondor offered a rich field of piratical opportunity. Set in their ways, most Mardruak Sorija returned to their traditional hunting grounds in the Felayja, now only beginning to recover from the ravages of the past decade. But the Felayjan harvest proved mean and fleeting. The devastated villagers and new colonists of the battered coastland offered the Sorija few returns for the amount of energy required to carry out their clandestine forays. Inevitably, the king became aware of these depredations and soon discovered the identity of their perpetrators.

This strained relations between the Tumakveh and his Mardruak vassals considerably. Arphazân sent angry missives to Nykkea and Narîk-zadan, insisting the their authorities seize the parties responsible and pay more "reparations" to their victims. The Tumakveh king failed to comprehend the pervasiveness of the Sorijan problem, as though these freebooters were but a few weeds that could be neatly plucked and uprooted from his garden. Far from the sea in Nîlûlondê, Arphazân did not realize that the "peace" he had brought to Mardruak was starving its mariners and driving them to desperation.

Repeated efforts to suppress the epidemic proved futile. Arphazân was losing his patience, but he could see no solution short of outright war. The king, however, was spared the ignominy of passing so harsh a judgement on a people who had surrendered themselves to his protection in good faith. In 975, Arphazân died in his bed at the ripe old age of 86, leaving the Sorijan problem for his son, Narkuzîr II Ervak, to resolve.

Better informed of conditions in Mardruak than his father had been (due to his governance of Hazaj Tollin and the Felayja), Narkuzîr intended to defeat the piratical threat by turning the Sorija against Dûsalan, bringing an end to Arphazân's policy of non-involvement with the war in the north. It was a gamble, but the king knew that there was no alternative: he must either use the Sorija for what they were born for, or exterminate half the population of Mardruak. Tragically for Bellakar, the die had already been cast against Narkuzîr's plan.

While Narkuzîr, Haz-Kajtor and Ârûzôr made secret preparations for a coordinated naval campaign against Dûsalan, Umbarean exiles in Nykkea were conspiring to sway the Sorija to join their Southron Alliance against Gondor, and to join in the war that was making their Dûsalanian brethren so wealthy. The Exiles rightly guessed what Narkuzîr and his governors were planning, and were anxious that the Sorija not join the ranks of their foes. A hostile Mardruak would cripple their efforts to make the South a sanctuary and refuge for their people.

The plot was successful. In the spring of 981, even as Narkuzîr was preparing to announce his intentions to his allies in Mardruak, the Sorija of Nykkea with their Umbarean allies seized control of the city. Haz-Kajtor was lynched by an angry mob. Into his shoes stepped Masul, one of the ringleaders of the mutiny. For many years Masul had served as Haz-Kajtor's admiral, and he more than any understood the plight of his men. He had seen the success of Lojnar and hoped to emulate it.

Masul's first objective was to encourage the spread of the mutiny throughout Mardruak. Most Sorijan veterans, already resentful of their discharge, could be counted on for support. The fleet of Narîk-zadan was another matter. The conspirators had allies among the Sorija there, but none of them were officers as in Nykkea. Being a longtime rival of Dûsalan, the prospect of a naval campaign with Tumakveh support outweighed the arguments of the Nykkean mutineers. A few ship companies attempted to rouse their comrades against this but were quickly put down by Ârûzôr and his captains.

Attempts at mutiny in Hazaj Tollin met with similar failure, though some high-ranking captains were numbered among the conspirators. Their downfall was Thônuzîr, a very young and courageous captain, a man of Sorijan descent. He promptly discovered the plot by playing a deadly game with the conspirators, portraying himself as an enemy of the Tumakveh, and disabled it by warning his lord Zâyunzîr, who had relatives in Ûrêzâyan, of the danger. In the next few days, the mutineers were arrested and sent to Korlea where they would have no allies to liberate them. Thônuzîr meanwhile was appointed chief captain of the Sorijan fleet.

Irked by these gaps in their otherwise united front, Masul immediately sent messengers to Lojnar in Dûsalan, urging him to support their cause and help the mutineers capture Narîk-zadan. Lojnar eagerly accepted this offer, hoping to make Narîk-zadan a base for himself and his corsairs. Both Lojnar and Masul were disappointed, however, when the fleet of Ûrêzâyan, apprised of the Sorijan revolt by Ârûzôr's son, Narakhîn, who had escaped Narîk-zadan's harbor before it was blockaded by the mutineers.

Unprepared for so swift a counter-stroke (the rebels being unaware that the king had already been preparing to launch his campaign against Dûsalan when the sedition broke out), the renegades were scattered by the ships of Bellakar, commanded by Narkuzîr's son, Prince Arzagar. An auxiliary Sorijan fleet from Hazaj Tollin kept Masul on the run while Arzagar came to the relief of Narîk-zadan. Frustrated by the impetuous Tumakveh prince, Lojnar withdrew to Dûsalan.

Like Gondorian-controlled Umbar in the north, Narîk-zadan now became a lone foothold for the Tumakveh upon a belligerent coast. Quick hit-and-run tactics could be employed to weaken the Sorijan strongholds, but unless the coastline itself could be wrested from their grip, no prolonged campaign was possible. As in the days of Ogtaï, the Sorija could thwart attempts at large-scale Tumakveh naval intervention by distracting Narkuzîr's fleet with lightning raids against Bellazen or the Felayja. Because of its length, the Bellakarian coast required more manpower to defend than Mardruak.

All the same, the mutiny was largely a Sorijan affair. Most of the civilian populace of Mardruak—Tedjin, Qarsag, Bellakaze and Bellanara—had no desire to bring on a war. Unfortunately, the terms of Arphazân's peace had disarmed most of the cape's inhabitants, concentrating political and military power within the walls of its two Kadîr, one of which was now firmly under Sorijan control. Tumakveh troops could still be landed at Narîk-zadan, but a movement of land forces westward from Hazaj Tollin could easily be blocked by the mutineers' new allies: the Tedjin of the Zimrênzil region and others dwelling within the sphere of Dûsalan's allies.

Some headway in remedying this problem was made by Thônuzîr, who in 948 succeeded Zâyunzîr as the lord of Hazaj Tollin, having the full approval of the king and the recommendation of Zâyunzîr before his death. The loyal Sorijan captain was invested at Hazaj Tollin by Narkuzîr's second son, Minulzîr. At Minulzîr's prayer, Thônuzîr offered gold to the Aukuag tribesmen of the Auz Hulja to attack and wear down the Tedjin of Zimrênzil.

To speed up the transformation of the mostly passive countryside into an active supporter of the mutiny, Masul invited these Tedjin to take possession of lands occupied by potential Tumakveh sympathizers. In this way, any dissenters would either be eliminated or forced to waste their energies fighting Tedjin. A final ingredient to the mix came with the appearance of a sizable armada of Umbarean exiles from out of the south in the summer of 986.

News of the seizure of Mardruak by allies of Umbar had fired the hopes of the Exiles (then sojourning among the Ârûwanâi of Anbalukkhôr and the Thânî Hazad). A string of fortified havens along that cape would place them within striking distance of Gondorian shipping, and would therefore advance their cause. Moreover, the end of Tumakveh indifference towards the northern war made Bellakar a threat that could not be ignored. Unless Narkuzîr and his warlike son could be kept in check, the odds of Ârûwanâ reclamation of Umbar would be jeopardized.

Joining forces with the Sorijan fleets of Lojnar and Masul, the Umbareans assailed and captured the mighty Tumakveh haven of Ûrêzâyan in a surprise attack on the 19th of Tamun, 986. News of this shocking turn of affairs reached Nîlûlondê four days later. Stung by this disgrace, Narkuzîr's valiant son begged leave of the king to lead an army at once to retake the city. But Narkuzîr remained silent, his face graven as stone, as though pondering the grim crisis they had fallen into. Then at last he spoke.

"Arzagar my son, Sword of the Tumakveh, let the siege of Ûrêzâyan be for others to conduct. For you I reserve a greater toil and a more perilous, upon whose success the fate of Bellakar now hangs, or so I deem. The Sorija alone we can defeat, but against the ships of the Ârûwanâi allied to them we have not the strength for victory at sea, unless other aid should come."

"But what others are there to aid us?" Arzagar objected. "For apart from our friends the Bozishnarod, we rule a land encircled by Ârûwanâi."

"Verily," answered the king. "But I spoke not of the ships of the Katedrala. Our quarrel is not theirs. I speak rather of the Men of Gondor, the Elendili, whom we once called our brothers."

At this a hush fell over Narkuzîr's court. Gondor? Though it was known to all now that the king had purposed to turn the Sorija against Umbar, most had thought this merely an attempt to rid Bellakar of an unwanted nuisance, not a gesture of friendship towards the Dúnedain of the Westlands. Ever since Tarannon Falastur of Gondor had broken troth with Barûthhîn, daughter of Narkuzîr I, relations with the north had been cold. Most in Bellakar who still called themselves Adûnâi took this rejection of their alliance as the ultimate insult to their heritage. Who were the Elendili to brand *them* Black Númenóreans? Why should the Tumakveh now degrade themselves by craving the aid of prideful people who had never deigned to help them in the past, but had returned friendship with outrage?

"Yes, Gondor," Narkuzîr repeated. "It is a hundred years and more since our house had dealings with the sons of Elendil; the last was King Narkuzîr I, my namesake. But his need was not the need that now presses upon us. Have you forgotten the words that Elendil spoke to our forefather Zagarthôr before the gates of the Dark Lord?"

Then the king held aloft the ring by which Elendil promised to aid the Tumakveh against the shadow of Black Númenor, and its red jewel glittered before the uplifted eyes of all.

"The Elendili may be prideful, but they revere the memory of Elendil. For his honor at least they will aid us." Then Narkuzîr set the ring upon Arzagar's finger, charging him: "Go north, my son, be it through a sea of enemies, and say to the King of Gondor: 'Macilion of Silmalondë bids you repay the debt of Elendil.'"

"I will, father," answered Arzagar, and took his leave of the king.

ARZAGAR AND CIRYANDIL (TA 986-988)

On the 1st of Sumat, 986, Arzagar son of King Narkuzîr II Ervak of Bellakar secretly boarded a Bozishnara merchant vessel bound for Pelargir. Across a sea controlled for many leagues by Ârûwanâi and their allies, the Tumakveh prince judged that his mission would be more likely to succeed if he sailed under the flag of a neutral power. This would lengthen his journey, but Arzagar could see no other way of reaching Gondor unhindered.

In the course of his voyage, the disguised Tumakveh beheld many shores and peoples he had never seen before except as vague names on Bellakarian maps in his youth. A wider world opened before him, and he came to understand better the place of his own country in the great war that was again brewing between north and south. He passed the Cape of Mardruak, now all but held by his enemies, pressing on northwards into the Bay of Umbar and the sea-walls of its great haven late in the year.

In Umbar, Arzagar learned that the king who wore the Winged Crown of Anárion was Ciryandil son of Eärnil. Eärnil had perished in a storm off the Umbarean coast many years ago, and now Ciryandil carried on the legacy of the Ship-kings and the war against the Ârûwanâi he had inherited from them. But what manner of man was this who now ruled the most powerful realm in Middle-earth? What did he know or care about Bellakar, so many leagues away? Would he answer the summons Narkuzîr had sent his son to make?

Trusting to fate, Arzagar revealed himself to Othwellon, the Gondorian captain of the haven, declaring his name and his errand. At first Othwellon was suspicious of this stranger who spoke in the vulgar Adûnaic tongue of distant kings and ancient alliances, but he sent word to Ciryandil nonetheless, and bade the Tumakveh prince remain in Umbar as his guest until the king should reply. Arzagar complied and spent the winter there, but begged the captain not to speak of his presence to any, fearing lest the Ârûwanâi or their Southron allies should get wind of him and attempt to thwart his mission.

Early in the spring, when the sea had grown clement for ships, a messenger arrived in Umbar from Osgiliath, informing Othwellon that the king would receive the prince. So Arzagar resumed his voyage upon a well-appointed ambassadorial vessel. During this final leg of the journey, the son of Narkuzîr asked the king's messenger to instruct him in the proper language and etiquette of the Dúnadan court. Arzagar had acquired a smattering of Quenya as a child (a private tradition of the Tumakveh since the days of Zagarthôr, though in recent generations its teaching had fallen into disuse due to Bellakar's estrangement from Gondor and the pressure of desperate times), but now he learned it aright, determined to meet the Gondorian monarch as an equal.

Arzagar's ship took haven in Osgiliath, city of kings, on 23 Gwaeron, 987. The might and glory of that city far exceeded all rumor of it that had ever reached Bellakar; for a moment, the Tumakveh prince imagined he had sailed to lost Númenor and now tread the glistening streets of Armenelos or Rómenna. But he did not forget the beauty of his own homeland nor the honor of his house. Arzagar strode proudly down the Hall of Kings where Narkuzîr I, his sire of old, had walked.

Before him sat Ciryandil upon his bejeweled throne, resplendent in his majesty. A herald announced Arzagar's name and lineage, as he had given it to Othwellon in Umbar. The prince kneeled and bowed his head in reverence. Then the king addressed a greeting to him in the common tongue of the Westlands, gesturing to his herald to translate the salutation into classical Adûnaic in case the Tumakveh were unused to such speech. But Arzagar raised his hand, commanding the herald to be silent, and returned his greeting in the High Eldarin tongue:

A Ondóreva Aran Eärnilion, Anárion Elendiliono inyo, Númenórië Heru Elendilion, na anda Aranielya ar alcarinqua.

O King of Gondor, Son of Eärnil, Descendant of Anárion Elendilsson, Lord of the Elendili of Númenorë, may your reign be long and glorious.

All who heard this were amazed that such words should come from the mouth of a Southron (as they thought him from his appearance), but Arzagar said: "Why do ye marvel, Men of Gondor? For I too am a Númenórean whose fathers rejected the Shadow, as they do even now in a land far from yours."

"Not all have forgotten the tale of your forefather, Macilion of Silmalondë," the king responded, "though its memory be darkened by tales of a different sort. For what cause have you journeyed so far, Tarmacil son of Thorondil? And why do the Tumakveh seek the sons of Elendil?"

Then Arzagar removed the ring from his finger and asked that it be shown to the king. "My father has sent me to say to you that Macilion of Silmalondë bids you repay the debt of Elendil."

Few who stood in that hall understood the meaning of those words; but Ciryandil, gazing intently at the ring and at Arzagar answered: "How may I, as inheritor of that debt, fulfill it?"

The Tumakveh prince then recounted to the king the deeds of his household against the Tedjin, and of the Sorijan alliance with the Umbarean exiles, and of their massing along the Cape of Mardruak, and of the loss of Ûrêzâyan. As Arzagar spoke, Ciryandil perceived that Mardruak was now a threat to Umbar as well as

the Tumakveh, and that unless the Bellakaranî held the coastlands between that cape and the Bay of Tulwang, he could not prosecute his war against the Southron Alliance in security.

But when the prince had finished speaking, Ciryandil answered: "I see your need, Tarmacil Tumakveh, and desire greatly the union of our strength in the reduction of Mardruak. But we in Gondor are already at war on another front, and we must attend to the foe on our own doorstep before we may redeem our debt to Bellakar."

"Who is this foe you speak of?" asked Arzagar, troubled at the thought of delay.

Ciryandil answered: "He is Tallas Lengur, Stone King of Korb Taskral that we call Amrûn, City of the Sunrise. He has dared to assail our southern borders. Even now our troops are being marshaled for a great battle in South Gondor. When this Haruze warlord is vanquished, we shall give thought to Mardruak."

"Then I beg you," interrupted the warlike prince, "to receive my sword-arm into your ranks, that I may hasten the downfall of this Stone King and the repayment of your debt. And if Tallas Lengur be not made of stone, you shall learn why the swords of the Tumakveh strike fear into all who worship the Shadow."

Ciryandil accepted Arzagar's service gladly, desiring to see of what mettle these southerners were made with whom he would soon join forces. And as the cooling breezes of fall rendered the "Summer Lands" sufficiently tolerable for campaigning, the Tumakveh set off in the great king's train from Osgiliath and crossed the River Poros into Harondor, battleground of kings. There Ciryandil's forces broke the army of Korb Taskral, in a cutting of the Redwater Gorge called Taloc Passage, just above its confluence with the Khârurush, across whose wide waters stood the Umbarean stronghold of Kadar an-Bêlabâr, whose mighty walls Arzagar was one day destined to overthrow.

As he had boasted to the king in Osgiliath, the Tumakveh prince's sword-arm was not idle in that battle. Indeed, Arzagar and the Bellakarian guardsmen who had sailed with him across the Sundering Sea fought with a fury that amazed even the mighty warriors of Gondor, knowing as they did that every stroke they dealt to the Gondorian king's foes would bring his aid nearer to Arzagar's embattled homeland. Arzagar remained at the king's side for the remainder of the campaign, as Ciryandil turned to the business of securing his gains and commanding the foundation of new fortresses. Then, returning to Osgiliath, the Gondorian and the Tumakveh debated how their enemies in Mardruak might be overthrown.

It was decided upon to wait until the winter winds had subsided, making the long sea-passage to Bellakar less uncertain for Ciryandil's fleet. The Tumakveh would strike the first blow, redoubling their assault of Ûrêzâyan by land and sea so as to lure its allies in Mardruak away from their havens. Then the Gondorian fleet would attack from the north, taking out Dûsalan beforehand in order to prevent it from posing a threat on their rear. In concert with this, Bellakarian land forces would advance from Narîk-zadan and Hazaj Tollin against the Tedjin allies of the Sorija, thus completing the reconquest of Mardruak.

The day appointed for these things to take place was 12 Lothron (Ishat) of the coming year. This would give sufficient time for Ciryandil to gather his naval strength and Arzagar to voyage back to Bellakar and inform his father of their plans. Then, taking leave of the Ship-king, the prince hastened to his homeland by the same way he had come.

THE MARDRUAK CAMPAIGN (TA 988)

Arzagar returned secretly to Bellakar on 7 Najam, 988, disembarking at Korlea and riding swiftly to Nîlûlondê. There he embraced his anxious father, announcing to Narkuzîr the success of his mission. The king was overjoyed to learn of Arzagar's valiant deeds in on behalf of the Gondorian king, and listened intently to the counsels of war which the prince had achieved with Ciryandil. Then Narkuzîr in turn recounted to Arzagar all that had befallen in Bellakar during his absence.

With the aid of the Sorija, the Umbarean exiles, he said, had repelled the king's attempts to besiege Ûrêzâyan and now occupied much of the surrounding countryside. Hazaj Tollin and Narîk-zadan had suffered numerous attacks but had not fallen, and the Bay of Tulwang remained free of the ships of their enemies, who were unwilling to antagonize the Bozishnarod. Lojnar was still at large, and his Sorija held Vulture Island, an atoll situated opposite Narîk-zadan to the southwest, blocking the egress of its ships.

But now the Tumakveh would have their revenge. Arzagar immediately set to work preparing the forces of Bellakar for the storm that would soon break upon its foes. He had little time to waste, for the day of Ciryandil's coming was but three months distant. The Sorija and their allies were by no means ignorant of these preparations, but of Ciryandil's armada they had no news until it was too late.

The Gondorian fleet had never sailed so far south in such numbers, always in the past confronted with a coastline of uncertain loyalty. But Arzagar's deeds in Harondor had shown him a trustworthy ally; Bellakar would provide the Ship-king with reliable harborage and provisioning for a naval adventure on an epic scale. Ciryandil would not stop with Mardruak. His ships would pursue the Umbarean exiles to the ends of Middle-earth so that their naval power might be broken forever.

When the 12th day of Ishat came, the Tumakveh were ready. King Narkuzîr led his armies against Ûrêzâyan round both sides of the Urîd an-Abâr, forcing the Ârûwanâi to concentrate their strength on the land. Meanwhile, the fleets of Korlea and Balkuzôr lay in readiness near Tarkhesh on the Kalz Filha, while those of Hazaj Tollin advanced along the eastern coast of Mardruak. But neither of these naval hosts were commanded by Arzagar. The warlike prince rode at once from the gates of Hazaj Tollin at the head of the Tumakveh cavalry, composed mostly of Bellanarod from the Auz Bekar and the Hulja Mountains.

These Arzagar led round the foothills of the Rôthurush vale, where Joam once stood, avoiding Kes Ebb, to assail from their unprotected rear the Tedjin of Zimrênzil. A great battle was fought at the oasis of Zimrênzil in which the Tumakveh prince slew the *kataj* of the renegade Easterlings, driving them in confusion into Mardruak. Arzagar pursued, hoping to force his prey into the country round Sarnak Hor, where the sons of Dashan-Jal could be counted on for support. The stratagem succeeded, and the remaining Tedjin foes were either slain or scattered.

Arzagar's ploy now made it possible for troop transports from Hazaj Tollin to land infantry in eastern Mardruak. These were led by Thônuzîr, the lord of that city; again, the prince would not take up the command of Thônuzîr's men, but bade him advance to the walls of Nykkea and lay siege to "that nest of Sorijan vipers." Then Arzagar marshaled his horsemen and sped onward, mounting the spine of the Auz Marda westwards toward Narîk-zadan. Twice he fought with the allies of Dûsalan on that road, and twice routed them; but ever as his path was lifted up upon the backs of the hills, Arzagar descried from afar the great war of ships that was now raging off the cape to the south and west. Ciryandil had come.

Had the Sorija and the Umbareans realized their peril they would have holed up in their havens, but thinking they were going to a battle against Bellakaranî only, they released too much of their naval strength onto the open sea where it would be vulner-

able to a superior force. Now they were caught between the fleets of the Tumakveh and of Gondor. The masts of Ciryandil's ships were like a forest of deadly spears, flying banners beautiful and proud, and upon their decks stood marines and mariners skilled in sea-warfare. The titanic clash was brief, the Sorija and Umbareans not yet trapped turning for the open sea, while those deprived of escape fought their way to a watery death.

Now all the enemy's havens were blockaded by sea and beset by land. The labor of reducing these to submission Ciryandil and his Bellakarian allies undertook. But the King of Gondor dispatched a division of his fleet to pursue the fugitive ships, being informed by messengers from the Tumakveh that the Gondorians would find paid Bozishnara merchant vessels anchored off the Cape of Bishra in Tulwang to see to their provisioning. Meanwhile Arzagar and his cavalry reached the rock of Narîk-zadan and dispersed its would-be besiegers. The gates were opened to the victorious Tumakveh prince, hailing him as *Imruphazgân* "the Conqueror." Thereafter he would carry that name into battle, proving time and again that its boast was not an empty one.

The reduction of Nykkea and Ûrêzâyan was a bloody affair, the defenders knowing that they would receive no mercy from the besiegers. Within three months, both strongholds were taken and the Cape of Mardruak was purged of enemies. (Dûsalan had been sacked and destroyed by the van of Ciryandil's fleet before the battle of Mardruak had begun.) What remained was a battle-torn coast, desperately in need of royal assistance. Fortunately, both the Tumakveh and Gondorian monarchs now had a personal stake in a stable and loyal Mardruak. To aid them in this undertaking, Ciryandil divided between himself and Narkuzîr the sizable war-chest of the Exiles which had been amassing ever since their seizure of Ûrêzâyan.

Narkuzîr used much of this to reward his naval officers, especially those of Sorijan descent from Hazaj Tollin, which he settled upon Mardruak in place of the rebels. But Narkuzîr would not repeat the mistakes of his father, for now Mardruak had a purpose: to guard against the passage of Gondor's enemies from out of the South. Ciryandil promised to help subsidize this enterprise with annual payments to the Tumakveh for the maintenance of their sea-power. In this the Ship-king of necessity found himself emulating the survival tactics of the Exiles, who everywhere relied upon the peoples of Haradwaith to sustain their war with Gondor. For the Tumakveh these were good tidings. Now their realm would have peace and the resources to preserve it.

The expeditionary fleet which Ciryandil had sent to hunt down the vanquished returned to Bellakarian waters early in the month after the fall of Ûrêzâyan. Its admiral reported both successes and failures. The Sorijan chiefs, Lojnar and Masul, were slain, but many of their followers had found refuge among the cities of Tulwang and Anbalukkhôr, which the Gondorians had not the strength to assail. Many of Anbalukkhôr's weaker southern neighbors, on the other hand, did not relish a confrontation with this formidable foe, and refused to give sanctuary to the Umbareans.

AFTER MARDRUAK (TA 988)

The surviving Exiles' hopes of using Mardruak as a central staging point for a reconquest of Umbar were shattered, and they themselves were condemned to a life of resentful wandering. An entire generation might pass before they could again gather the resources and manpower they needed to make another attempt on their homeland—more distant than ever, now that Gondor was paying the Tumakveh to be its watchdog in the South.

So most of the Exiles now spoke. But one among them, Khêruzôr son of Nûluzîr of Dûsalan, thought otherwise. He had been among the Exiles at Nykkea when the Mardruak campaign began, and so had been spared his father's fate. Withdrawing before the Gondorian onslaught with Masul's ships, Khêruzôr succeeded in reaching the safety of Kadar an-Khâradûn before Ciryandil's fleet could catch him. (Masul was not so fortunate.) Khêruzôr journeyed up the Balakurush to Zadan an-Adûn, presenting himself before the throne of Zimrubâr, lord of Anbalukkhôr.

"Dread Lord," said the Umbarean, "the Nimruzîrî of Gondor and Bellakar have joined forces against your brethren in the North. Craven that they are, these carrion-fowl prey first upon the houseless and the exiled; but if the Ârûwanâi of Umbar should be utterly defeated, they shall turn upon those that still have their homes. To ignore them is but to put off the day when Anbalukkhôr is beset with foes who have grown strong from Ârûwanâ carcasses. That day you can avert, Great King, if you hearken to my counsel. I am no beggar at your gates, but a stallion spoiling for the race. Place your money on me, and I will win that race, and the Ârûwanâi shall exalt your name to the stars!"

Khêruzôr found favor in Zimrubâr's sight as he unburdened to the lord of Anbalukkhôr the need of his Umbarean countrymen and his plans for avenging himself upon Ciryandil and the Tumakveh. Umbar, Khêruzôr explained, could not be recaptured unless the survivors of Mardruak, now refugees in Zimrubâr's realm, were reunited with their kinsfolk in the north. These were concentrated in strongholds on the Bay and Cape of Umbar and thence along the coasts as far as the River Khârurush, supported—some would say extorted—by their Southron allies. But unless some means could be discovered of occupying the Tumakveh fleet, the southern Exiles could not hope to pass Mardruak.

Two things were needful to achieve Khêruzôr's design: a sea-war and a land war, simultaneously directed against Bellakar. The naval front would be led by Zimrubâr in concert with the lords of the Thânî Hazad. Without the mighty Gondorian fleet to aid them, the Bellakarian navy would be easy prey for the Ârûwanâi. Such a victory would demonstrate the power of Anbalukkhôr to its northern neighbors. And for the Thânî Hazad there would be spoils and glory aplenty to bring home afterwards.

A synchronized distraction of Tumakveh land forces might be arranged with the Aukuag and other nomads of Haradwaith who ranged near to Bellakar. However, these tribes would not fight for free. Their ties with the Umbareans were based ever more blatantly on financial expediency, and the Exiles were becoming hard pressed to maintain their avarice. Zimrubâr was the king of a wealthy nation; with his backing, contended Khêruzôr, the Exiles would stand a fighting chance for a final, decisive union against the Gondorian juggernaut.

Zimrubâr had his own motives for patronizing Khêruzôr's ambitious scheme. Ever since the rise of the Tumakveh in Bellakar, Anbalukkhôr's economic and political influence on the Bay of Tulwang had become tenuous. The brief era of Tedjin rule over Bellazen had helped to restore that influence, due to the breakup of the Tumakveh fleet and Joam-Tuv's lack of experience in maritime politics; but now, with Gondorian sponsorship of Bellakarian naval power, Ârûwanâ hegemony on the bay could be expected to wane. Zimrubâr was determined not to let this come to pass.

He was also not unmoved by Khêruzôr's passionate devotion to the Umbarean cause. A restoration of the Exiles would bring Zimrubâr great fame indeed. The Ârûwanâi of North and South might then see a new era of dominance, just as the Tumakveh had experienced in the first flowering of their realm. For dreams of a golden age, the lord of Anbalukkhôr would pay gold; and with a

well-armed caravan to guard it, Khêruzôr departed Zadan an-Adûn, seeking the Burning Walk which would convey him through the Aukuag lands of the Dune Sea.

THE SOUTHRON ALLIANCE (TA 988-997)

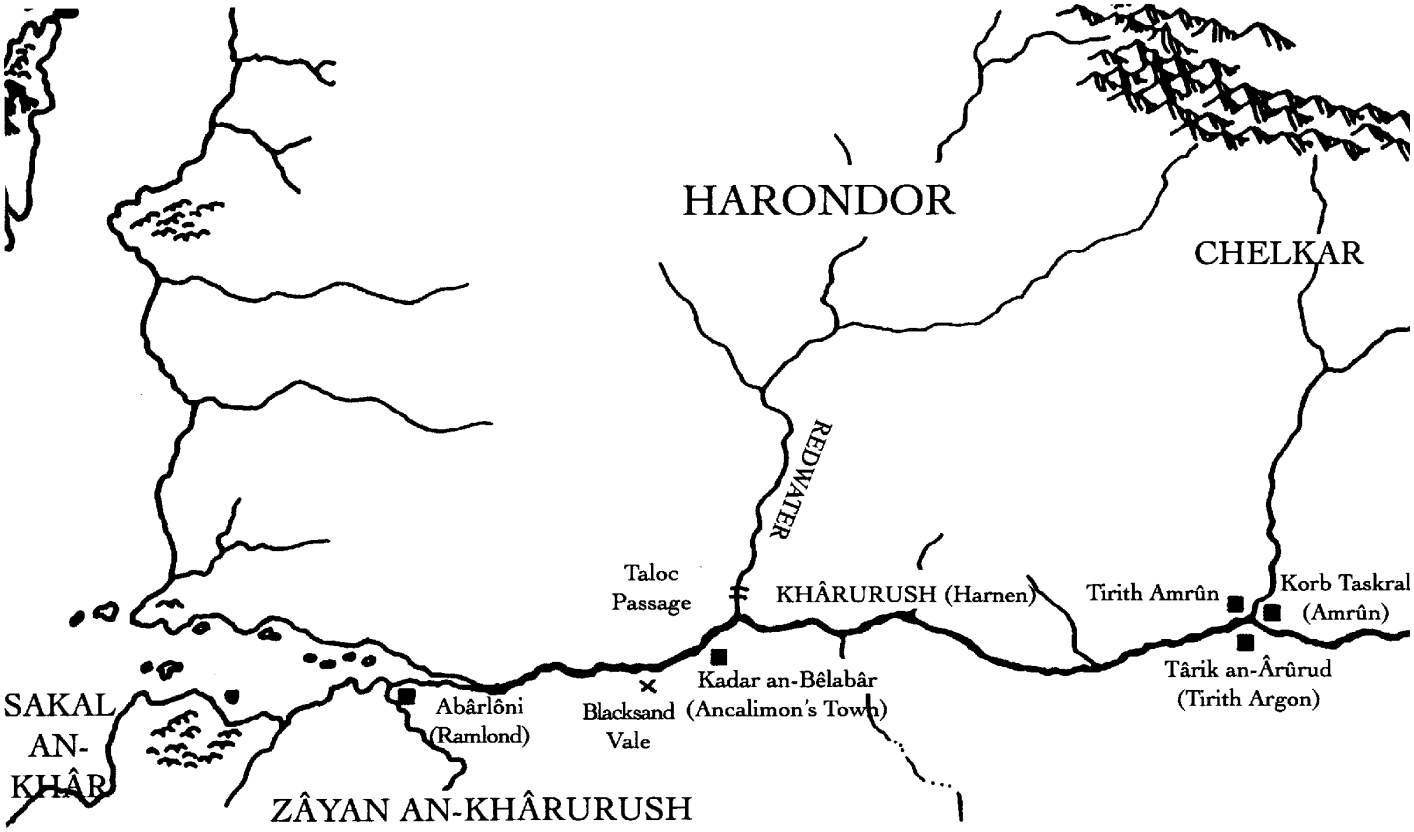
In the summer of 988, while Ciryandil was crossing swords with the Sorija and Umbareans of Mardruak, bloody deeds were being perpetrated on the king's newly-won eastern frontier in Harondor. A struggle for power arose in Korb Taskral to replace the Lengur dynasty that had perished in the Battle of Taloc Passage the previous spring. Most of the would-be successors were Tallas Lengur's officers and officials, but the squabbling was resolved in a single night of murder and mayhem by Eben Akil, scion of the Imocra, a backwater Haruze dynasty from the neighboring hill country of Chelkar.

As Taskral apparent, Eben made peace with Gondor, allowing the Dúnedain to commence construction of a guarding fortress directly across the Khârurush from Korb Taskral, within sight of the royal palace of the Stone Kings. Even as he sealed the documents, Eben was in communication with the Muargiz and the Council of Exiles in what remained of Umbar. The Haradon principals of this renewed alliance—the Haruze Imocra and the Jelut Muargiz—were determined to contest Ârûwanâ rule in Harad. However, a role reversal was asserting itself. It was the Haradrim, not the Umbareans, who would now decide when, where, how and by whom the next war against Gondor was to be fought; and it was the Men of Harad who would profit from it. Once lords of these subject peoples, the Ârûwanâi of Umbar found themselves treated as little more than their vassals and tools. At least they still shared a common enemy. Fortunately for the Exiles, they now had the cunning of Khêruzôr, Advocate of the Zâur an-Anî and friend of Anbalukkhôr, on their side.

Khêruzôr appeared among the Exiles at Abârlôni on the south bank of the Khârurush in the summer of 996, having spent the past decade negotiating with various Aukuag and Jelut tribes in support of his scheme. He had visited the Oasis of Five Palms, and there had placated the haughty but shrewd Desul, the high *chak* (chieftain) of the Muargiz and much of Haruzan, with the gold of Anbalukkhôr, promising the Jelut leader yet more wealth if he would consent to restrain his assault on Umbar until the hoped-for return of the fleet of the southern Exiles. Although he made no attempt to conceal his scorn for the precariousness of the Ârûwanâi's situation, Desul saw no good reason to pass up an opportunity for personal enrichment, particularly when it was tied to strategic advantage.

To Korb Taskral also Khêruzôr had journeyed, knowing that many Exiles had fled to its Adûnaic enclave of Târik an-Ârûrud. In the City of the Stone Kings, Khêruzôr got a better reception than in Desul's camp. The Taskral himself seemed a bit mad. He claimed to receive nocturnal visions and incubations from a nameless *Azhan*, a guardian, a spirit long associated with the Imocra family. Eben Akil revealed to Khêruzôr that it was at her prompting that he had joined the Southron Alliance, and that she prophesied great victories to come.

Encouraged by these favorable omens, as well as the strength and discipline of the Imocra armies, Khêruzôr completed his circuit of the Exiles' inland strongholds at Abârlôni, whence he intended to mimic Arzagar's deception of returning into the South on a neutral merchant vessel. In Abârlôni and along the coasts to Umbar, Khêruzôr took careful count of the numbers and disposition of the forces available to the Council of Exiles, considering how they might most effectively be marshaled and deployed when their time came. He considered the Tumakveh defenses of Mar-



druak and the Felayja with the same spirit of tactical calculation as he sailed past the hostile coast.

Khêruzôr returned to the court of Zimrubâr from his long odyssey in the spring of 997, reporting to the Black Númenórean lord all he had seen and achieved. Zimrubâr in turn told of his progress with the Thânî Hazad, saying that the westward-facing dominions of Khâradûnê, Zimrathâni and Elorna would join in their expedition. When Zimrubâr inquired about the time set for the prosecution of these great undertakings, the Advocate of the Zâur an-Anî replied with esoteric confidence. "When the Haradrim have consulted their Spirits, they will send a messenger. I pray only that their Spirits can also count the ships of the Elendili and post a watch on their harbors. If their message carries this wisdom, we shall surely drive our enemies with before us with blood and flame."

THE LAST ARMADA (TA 997-1012)

The spirits of the Haradrim, or the lords of the Southron Alliance, were in no hurry to make any dark pronouncements. Fifteen years passed without any oracle of war—visionary or otherwise—reaching the court of Zimrubâr of Anbalukkhôr. But Khêruzôr had more than enough work on his hands to keep him occupied. The task of locating, gathering and outfitting the southern Exiles, dispersed over more than a thousand miles of coastline, was formidable. Also, periodic journeys had to be made into the Dune Sea and the Auz Bekar in order to reassure the Ârûwanâi of their nomad allies' commitment. The same had to be done with the allied ports of the Thânî Hazad, which had periodic troubles of their own to deal with.

During all this time the realm of the Tumakveh flourished, having at last found the peace Bellakar needed to heal the wounds of more than a century of warfare and oppression. The fleet of King Narkuzîr Ervak grew in size and strength under the patronage of Gondor, but thus far it had not met its equal at sea. Occasional Sorijan raids from Anbalukkhôrian Tulwang were a minor nuisance and were easily contained. In 1010, the venerable Tumakveh monarch died, leaving his throne to an older and wiser, but no less valiant, Arzagar.

In the second year of Arzagar's reign, on the 20th of Najam, a spirit of the Haradrim finally spoke to Khêruzôr, Advocate of the Zâur an-Anî. Beneath a dark moon, a winged shadow alighted upon the balcony of Khêruzôr's chambers in the palace of Zadan an-Adûn. The guards and hounds in the courtyard around the palace screamed and ran in terror, and all inside shivered with a cold, dark fear, but he heard them not. Roused from sleep by what sounded like the distant melody of a lute, the sorcerer wondered whether he dreamed. But the darkness spoke to him words that he had long awaited: "Does the messenger of the Shining Lady find you at rest, son of Nûluzîr? How can you sleep when the hour appointed has arrived? This same word has been brought to the swords of the desert. But be quick, King's Man, lest the Muargiz rob you of your victory."

Then the winged shadow darted away from Khêruzôr into the night, as horses screamed in the stables below and two maddened servants plunged themselves into cook-fires to keep the darkness from devouring them. The Advocate did not understand the messenger's warning about the Muargiz, but he knew that he must not waste time pondering the riddle. At once Khêruzôr summoned the palace servants to wake the king, but he seized a trumpet from one of the guards at the castle gate and blew upon it, rousing all within hearing and crying out: "The hour is come!"

Within a fortnight word had spread to all the havens of the Exiles. On 3 Manjaz, 1012, the last armada of the Umbarean exiles set sail with the fleets of Anbalukkhôr and the Thânî Hazad from Kadar an-Khâradûn to reclaim their city from the Men of Gondor. A dark wind of doom drove them northwards, so that within a week they had rounded Cape Bishra and beheld the coast of Bellazen. There the armada of the Exiles separated from the main fleet, turning west into Belegaer to elude the ships of the Bellakaranî, following the path that Zagarthôr of Nîlûlôni had taken in the days of the Last Alliance. Zimrubâr's fleets meanwhile struck coastward, hungry for battle.

Naval scouts and watchers upon beacon towers alerted the defenders of Bellazen of the approaching peril, and soon a sea-battle was joined off the Tarkhesh peninsula. The Ârûwanâi greatly outnumbered the defenders, allowing Zimrubâr to further divide his forces north along Bellazen and east to intercept the fleets of Korlea and Balkuzôr. The lord of Anbalukkhôr meanwhile routed the guardians of Tarkhesh, assailing its haven so that the peninsula could be used as a staging ground for greater clashes to come.

The first round of the conflict closed with the Ârûwanâi holding the upper hand. The swiftness of the Anbalukkhôrian advance prevented the Tumakveh fleets on the Kalz Filha from reaching open waters where their ships could assume an effective attack formation, forcing them into defensive posturing that left their comrades in Tarkhesh unaided. The navies of the Thânî Hazad meanwhile raced northwards against the beacon fires, ignoring the villages and towns of southern Bellazen in favor of the richer offerings of Ûrêzâyan. They failed to reach that port with the advantage of surprise, but they did succeed in occupying its fleet.

By now, the hoof-beats of errand riders were thundering across the Lôkhurush vale, speeding news of the black ships of Anbalukkhôr to King Arzagar in Nîlûlondê. But when they had won through the passes of the Urîd an-Abâr, the messengers were confronted with a new peril: Aukuag horsemen were busy ravaging the country round about the Tumakveh capital. Having no cause to expect this sudden assault from the Auz Bekar—and no mounted auxiliaries at hand to counter the nomads; for Khibil Êphalak, Arzagar's chief source of cavalry, had already fallen to the raiders—Arzagar was compelled to endure a siege, while picked Tumakveh knights attempted to run the Aukuag gauntlet, racing their swift stallions north in hopes of finding their desert allies of the Hulja Mountains as yet uncompromised.

Fortunately for the Bellakaranî of the Kadîr, neither the Aukuag in the south nor the Jelut now assailing Mardruak from the wastes of the Kes Hilja were skilled in or inclined to siege warfare. Their task was to raid and pillage and move fast, so that the Tumakveh forces (especially their coastal defenses) would be distracted while the naval campaign proceeded apace. This meant that the Aukuag did not remain long in the Vale of Nîlûlondê, but quickly moved on westwards against the Felayja. This allowed Arzagar to lift the brief siege of his city and begin pursuing the enemy with every man who could be horsed. Learning of the Anbalukkhôrians on the Bay of Tulwang, he detailed the pick of the footmen of the garrison of the capital south to strengthen Korlea, Balkuzôr and Esmer.

As the king set out in pursuit, the Aukuag began terrorizing the Felayja, drawing many ships of Hazaj Tollin and Mardruak to the defense of its towns. Meanwhile, the heartland of Mardruak was under attack by the Jelut, riding down out of the Stone Fields east of Dûsalan and bypassing Zimrênzil to strike at the villages of the coasts. All things now played into the hands of Zimrubâr, who had captured Tarkhesh and was engaging the main fleet of the Tumakveh in the close waters of the Kalz Filha while the smaller ships the Tumakveh had stationed in their northern waters were caught up in a deadly dance with the Thânî Hazad forces, outsailing them but unable to strike a deadly blow against their superior numbers.

Whatever the outcome of this strange war in Bellakar was to be,

it had succeeded in its pretext: the northward advance of the Last Armada of the Exiles. In the month of Manjaz, nomadic *urdwan* horsemen of the Southron Alliance swept away the Gondorian outposts covering the approaches to the haven of Umbar, while the forces of the Council and their Haruze allies stormed and captured a number of watchtowers maintained by the Ship-kings on Umbar's ocean coast. Late in the month, as all of the Gondorian captain's attention focused on the landward threat, the vanguard of Khêruzôr's fleet attacked and captured the undermanned Gondorian fortresses of Durgal and Ardhúvir guarding the opening of the Bay of Umbar. They engaged and scattered the Gondorian squadrons that sailed out to meet what they thought was a pirate raid and thereby opened the entire bay and coast to the unchallenged passage of their arms. Khêruzôr himself sailed with a fast squadron to Abârlôni on the Khârurush, where he reported the deeds of the southern Exiles and urged those of the Sakal an-Khâr to take ship with him and sail to war along the great bay.

At Abârlôni, Khêruzôr learned the answer to the Shining Lady's riddle. The Ârûwanâi there informed him that a season ago Eben Akil of Korb Taskral had invaded the lands of Lurmsakûn to the east of his realm. This move away from their frontiers had led the Gondorians to relax their vigilance in the south. Even a portion of their great ships had gone away staging a ceremonial visit to distant Cardolan and the Elven lands beyond. Of late emissaries had come to Abârlôni from Desul of the Muargiz, commanding them to make ready to support him in final battle with the Ship-kings. Even as the Last Armada sailed, the *chak* had been dragging siege engines across the desert, bringing war up to the walls of Umbar itself for the first time in a generation.

Determined not to be subordinated to the will of the Jelut chieftain, Khêruzôr urged his northern brethren to gather all their strength and join him, using the swift road of the sea to beat Desul to the prize. If the Ârûwanâi held the fortresses along the inner coasts of the bay, the Muargiz would have to treat with them with greater respect in the siege of the haven that must follow. Anxious to bring this all about, Khêruzôr's fleet ferried the Exiles back to the Cape of Umbar, landing on the Azrarôth promontory on the 9th of Vetrashu. There they met with an assembly of the Exiles who held the northeastern coast of the bay and commenced the labor of reducing the remaining Gondorian garrisons.

Meanwhile in Bellakar, the tide had turned. On land, Arzagar's defense received much-needed relief from the cavalry levies of the Auz Hulja, who had remained for the most part faithful to the Tumakveh. Led by the Izindubêth, a successor to Imrathôr and leader of the adherents of the True Faith, the Huljan horsemen rode west into Mardruak on their own initiative, defeating or driving off the Jelut raiders. The Izindubêth then led his forces south into the Felayja, where they were joined to Arzagar's troops.

Sweeping aside the remaining nomads (who had little desire to face a mounted army greater than their own), Arzagar made a circuit of southern Bellakar until he reached Korlea. There he took personal command of his fleet, leaving the Izindubêth to pursue the Aukuag into the Auz Bekar and see to the liberation of Khibil Êphalak. Arzagar Imruphazgân then issued a challenge to the lord of Anbalukkhôr, daring him to allow the Korlean and Balkuzôrian fleets to meet his ships in the midst of the Kalz Filha, so that a fair fight might be joined. Eager for the glory that would accrue to him in such a triumph, Zimrubâr accepted the challenge, permitting his enemies to array themselves in battle-line upon the bay.

THE BATTLE OF CORALS (TA 1012)

Confident of victory because of his numbers, Zimrubâr sailed out from Tarkhesh to meet the Tumakveh navy on the last day of Manjaz, the day that was to mark the Battle of Corals. The lord of Anbalukkhôr arranged his fleet in a pincer formation, too broad for Arzagar encompass, so that the advancing Bellakaranî would have no choice but to allow themselves to be flanked by the Ârûwanâi. Undaunted, the son of Narkuzîr Ervak boldly formed the ships of Korlea into a spearhead, commanding those of Balkuzôr to hold back as an auxiliary when the Anbalukkhôrian pincers closed upon him.

It was a daring strategy—a desperate one, thought most—but it held one advantage that Zimrubâr could not cancel out: the wind was in the north, behind the Tumakveh. This would enable Arzagar's ships to be propelled into the heart of the Ârûwanâ center without the use of oar-banks, allowing them to fight at close quarters between the Anbalukkhôrian dromunds and prevent them from using their own rowers to maneuver. For this reason, Arzagar set his iron-beaked triremes in the van. If he could penetrate the enemy's center, he might break straight through and thence, turning, fall upon Zimrubâr's rear.

Trumpets rang out challenges, drums rolled and battle began. At first the speed of Arzagar's advance had its intended effect, disordering the Anbalukkhôrian formation. The tactic was not without heavy loss for Arzagar, however, as many of Zimrubâr's dromunds snagged the Korlean gunwales with grappling hooks, slowing their cast like flies in the newly-spun webs of a patient spider. Those caught were eventually trapped in a forest of hostile masts and boarded by fierce Ârûwanâ marines. Meanwhile the jaws of the Black Númenórean fleet closed fast behind the Korleans, forcing the Men of Balkuzôr into action.

But some of Arzagar's ships passed through the gauntlet into open water and prepared to turn for a counter-attack. Then the Tumakveh king understood why Zimrubâr had taken no precautions to thwart Arzagar's spearhead. Not far off, hitherto concealed from Arzagar by the mass of the Anbalukkhôrian wall, lay ships of the Thânî Hazad, many ships waiting to finish off whatever Korlean vessels managed to penetrate the king's center. These had anchored behind the Tarkhesh peninsula, hidden from the Bellakaranî, until they could be shielded by the fleet of Anbalukkhôr. Now they closed in for the kill.

Even Arzagar Imruphazgân's heart failed him, his fleets outnumbered and without hope of rescue. But as he made ready to die bravely, sword in hand, his despair turned to unlooked-for joy. Away to the east, just off the Cape of Balkuzôr, he saw a sight that brought him hope—another fleet, hastening towards the battle, its ships flying the banners of Bozisha-Dar. The Men of Raj, who had always stood aloof in the wars of Gondor and Umbar, had drawn the sword at last.

The Bozishnarod had never possessed many warships despite their martial reputation, their interest in the sea being mainly mercantile. Nevertheless, the Katedrala maintained a fleet sufficient to safeguard its interests upon the Bay of Tulwang. Who controlled Umbar was not a matter of great consequence to them, and so, unlike Bellakar, they had remained neutral in this largely Númenórean affair. The position of Anbalukkhôr on the Azra'm-Miraz, on the other hand, had been a Bozishnara concern ever since the War of the Renegades in the Second Age. The Men of the Dar would fight to keep Zimrubâr's fleet away from their front doorstep.

The winds of fortune had shifted for Arzagar Imruphazgân and the Bellakarian fleets, and the Ârûwanâi did not like it. Zimrubâr's auxiliaries from the Thânî Hazad turned tail and fled the battle, and together with the Bozishnarod, the Tumakveh king drove in upon the left pincer of the Anbalukkhôrian fleet, where

its depth of ships was shallowest. The rescuers broke through the ring to the Men of Balkuzôr and the surviving Korleans. The confusion of Zimrubâr's hosts became general and the rout began.

Sluggish and not very maneuverable because of its overwhelming mass, the Anbalukkhôrian armada was driven by the unexpected counter-attack against the great coral reefs that gave the Kalz Filha its name. Many an Ârûwanâ galley perished amid those deadly shoals, so that in after years mariners on the Bay of Tulwang would speak of this place as "Zimrubâr's Graveyard." That was not entirely accurate, since the lord of Anbalukkhôr did not himself perish in that catastrophe, but fled with the main body of his fleet for the safety of the Tarkhesh peninsula, where the allies that remained to him helped screen the Anbalukkhôrian retreat.

Arzagar, however, restrained his ships from further pursuit, perceiving that the Bozishnarod would not follow the Bellakaranî beyond the confines of their bay. The Ârûwanâi had been defeated, and never would such a host of Black Númenor again be mustered, though all the havens of the Southlands be emptied of ships. With the help of the Dar, Arzagar had conquered once again.

THE FATE OF THE EXILES (TA 1012-1016)

When Desul Muargiz rode within sight of the walls of Umbar at the head of armies of the Southron Alliance late in the spring of 1012, he found much of the surrounding countryside and many of its strongholds under the control of Khêruzôr of Dûsalan and the united Ârûwanâ exiles. It troubled Desul that allies he wished to treat as vassals had found strength unforeseen to seize ground he had chosen for his forces, but he was heartened at the surprising sight of black sails flecking the Bay of Umbar. So he met with Khêruzôr and the Council on a hill overlooking the haven and praised their achievements, but not without cautions and condescension.

In the end, he rose with his generals and *chaks* and made to dismiss the Umbareans: "You have done well to prepare my way. Now look to your fortresses and ships and let the Muargiz do their part."

But Khêruzôr answered him, saying, with a wave of his hand to the west: "We will return to our strongholds, and still more we shall take, until all this bay is ours once again. And thus, by the swords of the Adûnâi shall Desul Muargiz be permitted to continue his siege on our behalf, whose haven this is."

Desul was rankled by these words, unbefitting of one inferior to him in power and prestige, and the closest of his captains put hand to their scimitars. But the Advocate of the Zâur an-Anî checked the Southron's rage with these words: "We look for your glorious victory over the Nimruzîrî, your enemy and ours; it would be unfortunate if, by some failure of our vigilance, the Ship-king were to land an army upon our coasts and lift your leaguer, Desul Muargiz. We shall not fail in that task."

The Jelut chieftain's face grew cold at this shrewd reply, but not for nothing was he thought the wisest of the chieftains of his day. He spoke to Khêruzôr coolly, saying: "Look to your ships, indeed, Man of the Farthest South. You will need many more of them and all your courage to hold these waters. The Ship-king will come, and your right to the haven will be tested by a judge sterner than myself."

In the end, both the scribes of the King's Men and of the Haradrim recorded the scene. Never again in that age did their peoples rise so high in challenge to the might of Gondor. For, as they spoke, Ciryandil was mustering his fleet, even as Arzagar sternly mustered his soldiers to the cleansing of his realm. But the siege of Umbar was made and lasted through the summer. There were heroes aplenty on all sides. Desul held the haven in close siege, and his warriors cast a stone to strike down its captain. But Therindel, the wife of the slain knight, held the defenders to their work, and became known as the Widow of Umbar as she walked the battlements in black robes.

In the fall, word came to Khêruzôr of the defeat of Zimrubâr, who had retreated to his ports in Tulwang. Then too came Ciryandil of Gondor, and with him three mighty sons and a fleet of great ships. The Exiles had great captains also, enough to hold the coasts against Gondor, but not enough ships or men to drive them away.

So there was stalemate. In 1013, the second year of the war, Ciryandil's youngest son lost an arm in fighting with corsairs of the Thânî Hazad, come north now that the coasts of Bellakar were held against them. Ciryaher, the prince-heir of Gondor, sailed against these reavers, even taking port in Zimrathâni. But the seas could not be made secure.

In the summer, Khêruzôr led ships of the Exiles in raids against the coasts of Arnor, while Zimrubâr's captains made sport along the shores of Gondor and Bellakar. This was no substitute for a victory of fleets that they could not achieve, and Arzagar punished them for it, raiding south against Tulwang and sinking ships in their harbors. On one of these raids, Zimrubâr was mortally wounded, and the Bellakarian could at last claim some revenge for their sufferings at his hands.

The third year came, and weariness set in amongst all save the Muargiz. Desul used the war wisely. He gained ever-increasing control over the Exiles as their strength lessened, and his increasing prestige drew ever more Haruze to his cause. The Jelut ceased making raids on Mardruak, and Arzagar's northern frontier was secured. However, the king of Bellakar had no strength to make a counter-stroke across the Kes Nilja or the Stone Fields. He could only send a few token ships and soldiers to Umbar by the dangerous sea route. In the great haven, men living for two years on scant rations sickened and died in numbers, even the mighty among the Dúnedain. The Widow of Umbar returned to Pelargir blinded by a fever but unbowed in her walk, and Ciryandil himself commanded the garrison now.

So it was that Minulzîr, brother of King Arzagar Imruphazgân, was witness in Umbar when the Southrons made their greatest stroke. The garrison, led by Ciryandil, sortied against an assault of fire towers manned by knights of Pezarsan. By the light of the flames, the king was struck in the hip by a Haruze arrow and bled to death in his armor as he directed the battle. Minulzîr helped carry him into the haven, and brought the report of the king's death to Arzagar in the winter.

Khêruzôr himself never learned of this victory, for he had joined a raid on the Mouths of Anduin and was burned alive in a sinking ship within sight of Pelargir. Desul, of all the leaders who had begun the war, saw himself as its master. In the fall, as Arzagar exchanged letters of truce with Anbalukkhôr, Desul declared himself Autarb of Haruzan and the Exiles his vassals. They had little hope, but no lack of desperate courage. One of their knights murdered the Muargiz *chak* as he held court in his camp near Umbar.

Hatred and turmoil kept the war going for two more seasons, but no nation had treasure or ships or spirit enough to continue. Ciryaher, the new king of Gondor, could only promise Arzagar his continued good faith, and Arzagar could only promise friendship and gratitude to Gondor's kings. Anbalukkhôr and Korb Taskral, little realizing how weakened their enemies were, both accepted truce offers.

Little had been gained, as anyone could tell. But if a scribe had taken count from Korb Taskral to the shores of Mûmakan, he would have found little left of the Black Númenórean bloodlines, so carefully tended for a millennium. As the Tedjin Wars had drained Bellakar of its older Adûnaic heritage, so had the Last Armada drained the inheritance of the Ârûwanâi. The next millen-

nium of the Third Age would see the triumph of the traditions of Tar-Palantir and Elendil, of the doomed Tar-Míriel and Anárion, at least for a time.

THE VICTORY OF HYARMENDACIL (TA 1016-1050)

The truce of 1016 changed nothing. After nearly a century of war and conquest, the Ship-kings of Gondor were still no nearer to controlling the Sakal an-Khâr or the Bay of Umbar than Eärnil after his seizure of the haven in 933. A mere semblance of peace settled upon Haradwaith for the next two decades as the great powers of North and South prepared for the next round of hostilities. These broke out in 1039, when King Ciryaher defeated the Exiles of Abârlôni and occupied their haven. Ciryaher's hopes of pursuing his advantage were shattered, however, by a Nûrniag invasion of Harondor. But the king retained control of Abârlôni as a foothold on the south bank of the Harnen, renaming it Ramlond.

Six years later, the dormant Southron Alliance was revived under a new warlord: Talasc Imocra, son of Eben Akil of Korb Taskral. Under the inspiration of the Shining Lady, the ruthless Talasc massacred the "old guard" of the alliance's vacillating Muargiz leadership at the Oasis of Five Palms in 1045. Even the Exiles were afraid of this cold-blooded fanatic, and some began to abandon their cause in hopes of accommodation with Gondor. As reports from his subjects in Harondor reached him in Osgiliath, Ciryaher sensed that a day of reckoning was fast approaching.

Born in 899, Ciryaher had lived out most of his life in the shadow of this war. He had helped his grandfather take the haven in 933 and he had seen his father die before its walls in 1015. His only hope for final victory, he reasoned, was to gamble, as Eärnil had, that his sea power would keep his armies fed long enough to force a decisive battle. Knowing he would need all his strength and still more for such a campaign, Ciryaher sent heralds to his allies, bidding them send him whatever aid was in their power.

When Ciryaher's emissary to Bellakar arrived at Nîlûlondê in the spring of 1049, he beheld an aging King Arzagar. After he had delivered Ciryaher's message, the old conqueror nodded his head solemnly. "So we come to it at last; the great battle of our time in which all things shall stand or perish. Tell your king to look for the masts of the Bellakaranî at Ramlond."

Ciryaher was glad of the news, but when the Bellakarian ships entered the harbor of Ramlond in the autumn of that year he was overcome with amazement; for at the head of the fleet, upon the deck of the Tumakveh flagship, sat Arzagar Imruphazgân on his golden throne, his son Anîzîr at his side. Arzagar the Conqueror had returned to Harondor to fight at Ciryaher's side, though four score years and eight weighed down his craggy brow.

At once the Gondorian king came aboard Arzagar's ship to greet his friend and ally. "What marvel is this?" said Ciryaher. "Does the Victor of Mardruak and Kalz Filha seek more victories still?"

"Whatever glory is to be won from this war shall be yours, Ship-king," answered Arzagar. "I come to repay the debt that Macilion of Silmalondë owes to the son of Ciryandil, who saved the realm of my father from ruin. My arm cannot wield blade as it once did, so I have brought with me another to wield it for me."

Then Anîzîr drew his sword and offered the hilts to Ciryaher. "Receive this blade into your service, Great King, and assign to it a share in the labors to come."

Ciryaher accepted the blade and answered: "There are many great deeds to be done in this war. But since you have come with ships, I shall choose a task suited to your strength. There is city, Kadar an-Bêlabâr, last great stronghold of the Ârûwanâi upon Harnen. While it stands, our foes will be in a position to fall upon our rear as we march against Talasc Imocra. But if the Tumakveh will besiege this place, I know that I need fear no trouble from that quarter."

"If the fall of Kadar an-Bêlabâr be your will," responded Arzagar, "we shall perform it."

With Ciryaher or Gondor and the Taskral marshaling their troops at opposite ends of the Harnen, Zâyan an-Khârurush swelled with forces equal in magnitude to those that fought there in the time of Ar-Pharazôn's great invasion. The armies met in the Blacksand Vale, some leagues west of Kadar an-Bêlabâr, and fought there a titanic battle in which Talasc perished. Much of Ciryaher's victory at Blacksand was due to the failure of the Exiles and the Jelut to show up in time to support the Imocran host. Pre-arrangement underlay this tardiness, his erstwhile allies eager to punish the Taskral for his treachery at the Oasis of Five Palms; but the Tumakveh siege of Kadar an-Bêlabâr played a role as well.

This city had arisen as a military colony of Númenor in the wake of the War of the Renegades in 2281. Named after Tar-Ancalimon, a colossal bronze statue of that monarch still towered in the midst of the city's main square, a memorial to the First King of the Ârûwanâi. Sailing up the Harnen in their ships of war, the Bellakaranî now came to overthrow those mighty walls and requite Ancalimon's latter-day followers for the evils their race had brought upon the Southlands.

In this herculean labor, the Tumakveh were aided by siege engines and crews lent them by Ciryaher at Ramlond. Arzagar himself did not participate in the siege, but sat upon his throne, always within the sight of his men, and gave wise counsel to Anîzîr his son. As they flung themselves into battle, the Bellakaranî would point at the worn and tarnished colossus of Bêlabâr and taunt their adversaries, saying "Behold the great conqueror! But ours is greater!"

The siege pressed on into the next month, while Ciryaher left the carnage of Blacksand for the final showdown with the Jelut and the few remaining exilic lords not ensconced by the Tumakveh at Bêlabâr. This took place at Kruk Fedalk in the desert east of Umbar. Once again, Ciryaher had the mastery, and only a few days after the battle, Tumakveh errand riders came to report the fall of Kadar an-Bêlabâr. Ciryaher's victory was now total, and he named himself Hyarmendacil, "South-victor."

The Umbarean war had been won one hundred and seventeen years after it had begun. The dramatic triumph of Ciryaher Hyarmendacil's forces at Blacksand, Kruk Fedalk and Kadar an-Bêlabâr (thereafter known simply as "Ancalimon's Town") portended years of peace and prosperity to come. Korb Taskral ostensibly remained independent, but in fact became a satellite of Gondor and was and was known thereafter by its Gondorian name of Amrûn. The future of the Southlands now belonged to Gondor and its allies.

THE RETURN OF THE SORIJA (TA 1050-1235)

The aura of invincibility and affluence enjoyed by Gondor and its allies under Hyarmendacil remained strong during the reign of his son, Atanatar Alcarin the Glorious. "But Atanatar loved ease and did nothing to maintain the power that he had inherited, and his two sons were of like temper. The waning of Gondor had already begun before he died, and was doubtless observed by its enemies (RotK.325)."

Bellakar began to feel the first effects of this decline during the final decades of Atanatar's rule. Throughout the 12th century,

Gondor's fleet shrank, as there were no powerful foes for it to face. At the dawn of the 13th century, the increasing importance of transcontinental trade, particularly the traffic in exotic luxury goods passing through Near Harad, encouraged Gondor's mercantile interests to shift the kingdom's military attention away from the sea. Monies that would have been spent on the fleet subsidized instead the powerful merchant-princes of Haruzan and Lurmsakûn in their efforts to keep the caravan routes from the Ered Harmal free of Variag and *urðwan* interference.

The reduction of naval finance resulting from this shortened the effective southward reach of the Gondorian fleet. More pointedly, it virtually ended Gondorian patronage of the Tumakveh navy, thus inviting a resurgence of piracy along the Cape of Mardruak. For a long time this corsairy, which preyed upon the seaways between Umbar and the Bay of Tulwang, was virtually indistinguishable from the maritime policing activities of local Tumakveh authorities—particularly those of Nykkea—whose custodianship of the coasts became more proprietary as royal monies once designated for their use dried up.

In Narîk-zadan, the local Tumakveh authorities were more active against pirates. In answer to its governor, Atej Mazarek, many Sorija who had been settled there in the time of Narkuzîr Ervak gladly took advantage of the money to be had from taking part in counter-measures emanating from Nîlûlondê. Atej Mazarek tried to act as the protector of all Mardruak, but it was a too great a task. Other towns did not take kindly to his efforts, as many of them were the very perpetrators of the deeds Atej sought to suppress.

For the most part, the depredations of these potentates were confined to the extortion of "protection tariffs" for safe passage around the cape; only those who refused to pay suffered violent seizure of their cargoes. For the bullied merchants, such corruption had become an accepted fact of sea travel, so that many years had to pass before their complaints, supported by Atej Mazarek, began to elicit more than nominal responses from the Tumakveh court.

By the 1220s, the success of Mardruak corsairy had found bolder emulators. The wealth that the Gondorian peace of the past century had brought to the Azra'm-Miraz enabled its cities to amass sufficient strength to break the shackles of economic and political dependence on their southern neighbor, Anbalukkhôr, its prestige already tarnished by the Battle of Corals in 1012. Exultant in their newfound freedom, but unable to forge a league of common interest, these fiercely independent port-towns became magnets for ambitious Sorijan mariners eager to return to a life of freebooting.

Enjoying complete support from their mother-cities, the aggressive and organized Sorijan fleets soon had a stranglehold on all sea-traffic passing through the Bay of Tulwang and the Bellazen coast, thus becoming a serious threat to Bozisha-Dar as well as to Bellakar. The dramatic success of these reavers spurred the Mardruak corsairs to yet bolder ventures against the Felayja and even as far north as the Bay of Umbar, rightly confident that the Tumakveh would be too preoccupied with their Tulwang counterparts to curtail their brigandage.

The ruler of Bellakar at this time was Bêlphazân II, a descendant of Arzagar Imruphazgân. Now hoar with years, the aging Tumakveh entrusted the eradication of the new menace to his vigorous grandson, Sakalkhâd. But unlike the Sorijan wars of old, in which the Tumakveh enjoyed the advantage of landward as well as naval assaults, now the pirates were firmly entrenched upon a coastline inaccessible to Bellakarian land forces, both because it was separated from them by the bay and because it was defended by populous city-states. These two facts cut off all hope for a decisive victory.

Nevertheless, Sakalkhâd applied himself to the task with great resolve, reordering Bellakar's navy on Sorijan lines—small squadrons dispersed at regular intervals along the coast beside beacon-towers which could swiftly muster neighboring flotillas at the first sign of trouble, rather than a few fleets concentrated in the larger ports (an arrangement which hampered their ability to repulse sudden threats to towns and villages located far from the major cities). By this means Sakalkhâd secured Bellazen and the Felayja while further strengthening the coastal defenses along the Bay of Tulwang.

The Tumakveh prince launched some successful forays against the Tulwang coast, but these served to intensify rather than blunt Sorijan reprisals, culminating in the wholesale sack of Balkuzôr in 1231. Simultaneous efforts by the Bozishnarod to assail Tulwang by land met with signal failure. Between the Mardruak corsairs and the Sorija, Bellakar and its allies were simply outmatched.

THE CAPTAIN OF SHIPS (TA 1235-1257)

When Sakalkhâd became king in 1235, he sent his brother Kadarzagar north to seek aid from Gondor. Atanatar was now dead, and his son Narmacil ruled in his stead. Since the time of the Ship-kings, the heir to the Winged Crown had always held lordship over Gondor's fleets until the day of his accession. So Narmacil had done under Atanatar his father. Narmacil was a weak and corrupt man, and had done little to combat smugglers and corsairs in his time as Captain of Ships. However, he was, at least, aware of the situation of Gondor's southern allies, and was sympathetic to young Kadarzagar's pleas for assistance against the Sorija and the Mardruak pirates.

But Narmacil had no son with whom to entrust the command of his fleets. Both he and his younger brother Calmacil, who exercised that office in the presumed interregnum following Narmacil's ascension to the thrown, had been tied in with the Arbitrers, a political faction linked to spreading Gondor's sway eastward across Near Harad, seeking power and riches in the Easterling realms beyond the Ered Harmal. The Arbitrers, always hostile to Bellakar and other "seaward" interests, had been disgraced in the eyes of Gondor's nobility after an independent military expedition created by them had been destroyed at Calterc Prairie in the Chey lands in 1224.

The king's brother now counseled caution in the disposition of the realm's military resources. In the aftermath of Calterc Prairie, all of the high plains of central Endor were aflame with war. Reports came of new dangers upon Gondor's northeastern frontier, of Easterling raiders and Variag rampages and priests who worshipped fire and darkness. Threats loomed on the eastern horizon beyond the Sea of Rhûn, as well as on the borders of Lurmsakûn. In these circumstances, the fate of far away Bellakar would clearly take second place in the mind of the Gondorian king.

Yet there was one factor in Bellakar's favor: the ambition and rivalry of Calmacil's two sons, Minalcar and Calimehtar. Should Narmacil die childless, the crown would pass to Calmacil and his sons. According to the customs of Gondor, the right of succession rested with the eldest son of the king, but under the Ship-kings control of the fleets had become an equally important basis for the monarch's authority. Were this office to become the possession of someone other than the intended royal heir, the temptation to curry the favor of maritime interests as a political counterweight to the rightful inheritor would grow.

This is exactly what was about to happen. Of all the Line of Anárion, Calmacil's son Minalcar alone still had the respect of the powerful in Gondor. In 1240, because of the Easterling threat, Narmacil, "to rid himself of all cares," made Minalcar *Karma-*

kundo, Regent of the Realm. But he entrusted the fleets to Minalcar's younger brother Calimehtar, naming him Captain of Ships. Ten years later Calimehtar persuaded the king to make this office hereditary to his sons. Calimehtar's first priority was to restore the unchallenged supremacy of the Gondorian fleet on the Bay of Belfalas and its honor among Gondor's far-flung allies.

The Tumakveh now had a powerful advocate within Narmacil's court, and through Calimehtar's unstinting efforts funds were soon made available for the outfitting of a new fleet. Messengers went to and fro between Pelargir and Nîlûlondê, and by the autumn of 1244 a joint Gondorian-Bellakarian campaign against the pirate-bases of Mardruak was in readiness. The campaign commenced in the spring of the following year and was concluded before the end of summer. Long inured to ease and unaccustomed to organized opponents, the corsairs of the cape were no match for the combined might of the Captain of Ships and the land forces of the Tumakveh. Those that escaped simply fled to their brethren in Tulwang.

Atej Mazarek of Narîk-zadan now had a free hand to campaign against the corruption of his peers, successfully destroying his enemies and enforcing order upon his people. He met an honorable death in a naval battle off Vulture Island and was buried there. His son, Ishtiran, finished the mopping-up operations. In consideration for his service to the Tumakveh and Gondor, Sakalkhâd made Ishtiran the first Sorijan *asapthubêth* of Mardruak, which portended assurance of the future loyalty of those of Sorijan blood on Mardruak to the Tumakveh.

THE SECOND SORIJAN WAR (TA 1257-1258)

Even with his renewed naval strength, however, Calimehtar had neither the authority nor the resources to commit the southern division of Gondor's fleet to a far-flung venture against a major piratical power two hundred leagues and more beyond Mardruak. Instead, the Captain of Ships resumed the old policy of the Ship-kings, of subsidizing allies to fight his war by proxy. While Minalcar his brother was wooing the Northman princes of Rhovanion as allies against the Easterling menace, Calimehtar's coffers were being opened to adventurous ship-captains and mercenary crews from Umbar, Harondor and Haruzan, while shipwrights and naval experts were being sent into the coastal cities of Bellakar under orders to help the Tumakveh increase the size of their fleet.

The Sorija were not ignorant of these developments, and would have taken swifter steps to thwart them had they not been distracted by renewed conflict with Anbalukkhôr, thanks to the machinations of the Katedrala. Taking their cue from Calimehtar, the Regents of Bozisha-Dar contrived to bribe Tulwang's southern neighbor to renew war on its erstwhile dependency while the armies of the Gusar and other Bozishnara clans harassed the Sorija's desert frontier on the east. With the recent loss of Mardruak and the "betrayal" of Narîk-zadan, the Sorija had no allies to turn to.

But the corsairs of Tulwang were still strong, and they remained unequalled upon the sea for many years before the grand scheme of their foes came to fruition. In 1257, all was prepared: fifty warships had been added to the Tumakveh fleet, stationed in Korlea, Balkuzôr and Târik an-Narduvî; allied privateers lay in wait beside their coastal raiders along Bellazen and the southern Felayja; Sakalkhâd's troops were loaded onto transport ships, ready to bring their swords to Tulwang.

The Second Sorijan War broke out in mid-summer of that year. Beset with foes on all sides, the cities of Tulwang could not risk allowing their fleets to be bottled up in the havens. But neither could they set all their hopes upon a large-scale naval engagement on the bay, since, with the aid of the Gondorian-paid mercenaries, their enemies now held the advantage of being able to attack them on two fronts simultaneously—north from the coasts of Bellakar and west from Belegaer.

Their solution was a desperate one. Deeming their ports and Tulwang's rugged coastline strong enough to resist a determined sea-assault that lacked landward support, the Sorijan fleets abandoned their havens even as their opponents were setting sail for the hostile shore. But rather than challenging the Tumakveh navies, the Sorija divided their strength east and west, their armadas delivering sudden, devastating assaults against Anbalukkhôr and Bozisha-Dar.

With large contingents of its land forces committed on the borders of Tulwang, the coastal defenses of Raj and its Adûnaic allies to the south were swept away before the savage onslaught of over a hundred Sorijan war galleys. The Katedrala was nearly captured, and Kadar an-Khâradûn, Anbalukkhôr's chief port-city, was ransacked. The Sorija might have done even greater damage, but that was not their purpose.

The allies had fallen for the deception. Confident that a divided Sorijan fleet would not dare to meet their combined fleets at sea, Sakalkhâd ordered only minimal detachments to pursue the ostensibly fleeing pirates (which the Sorija quickly trapped and captured by stratagem), blockading the cities of the Tulwang coast with his main force and patiently awaiting the arrival of the Gusar from the east and the Adûnâi of Anbalukkhôr from the south so that the corsair havens would be trapped. Instead, the advancing Gusar and Anbalukkhôrians were anxiously recalled by their decimated countrymen.

As soon as the Sorija caught wind of the returning armies, they hastily withdrew from the coasts. Now, with the majority of the enemy fleet concentrated within the Azra'm-Miraz, the returning Sorija could turn the tables on those blockading their ports. The full force of both wings of the Sorijan fleet fell upon Sakalkhâd's ships, now dispersed among the several port-cities of the Tulwang coast. The Tumakveh navy and its Haruze and Umbarean auxiliaries suffered major losses and were forced to retreat to the safety of Bellazen and southern Bellakar. Thanks to Sakalkhâd's wisdom, his coasts had not been left without sufficient defenses to repel the pursuers. The Sorija withdrew again, and prepared for a watchful winter. The allies licked their wounds.

But the elation of their stunning victory soon evaporated as the lords of Tulwang realized that so bold a ploy could not be successfully repeated, and that the next year would see their downfall unless other aid could be found. The Sorija did not have long to wait before an opportunity presented itself. The destruction of Kadar an-Khâradûn by the corsairs became a dramatic demonstration to Anbalukkhôr's southern neighbors that the Adûnâi of that land were not invincible, and soon Sorijan emissaries came among the Adena and Sederi peoples of Khâradûnê, recalling to them the wrongs they had suffered over the years from the haughty Ârûwanâi, and persuading them to make war.

This fevered scrambling for help succeeded in the south, preventing Anbalukkhôr from participating in the coming campaign season of 1258. But Anbalukkhôr was only one of many dangers Tulwang now faced. During the winter of 1257, Sakalkhâd of Bellakar and the lords of the Katedrala were preparing strokes that the corsairs would find difficult to counter. Having repaired their coastal defenses from the damage wreaked by the Sorija, the allied fleets were concentrated at Târik an-Narduvî, Balkuzôr and Tarkhesh, within striking distance of any corsair movement into or out of the Azra'm-Miraz. Placing these fleets and the defense of Bellakar under the command of Prince Kadarzagar, the Tumakveh king and the Bozishnara warlord led their combined land forces southward around the bay, strengthening the coasts as they ad-

vanced.

By dividing their forces in this way, the allies prevented the Sorija from diversionary attacks on their coastlands while at the same time discouraging the pirates from venturing from their havens, lest they be forced to fight the fleets that now guarded the waters of the bay. The Sorija and their cities were trapped. Their only alternative was to trust to their natural defenses and wait out a long siege, hoping to wear down their foes by a lengthy land war on difficult terrain.

Much of Tulwang was an arid plateau eroding sharply into deep canyons as it approached the sea. A central chain of hills caught precipitation from moist breezes off Belegaer and the Bay of Tulwang, feeding a number of swift rivers whose courses had delved these canyons in ages past. The cities of Tulwang lay mostly within these well-watered gorges, a barrier to landward intruders and a source of arable land. So long as war could be kept on the semi-desert plateau above the canyons, the defenders would hold the advantage.

Fortunately for the Sorija, it was a long and hard road for an invasionary force to march along the coast from the hill-country of the Brij-Mijesec to the Bay of Raishoul that marked Tulwang's eastern frontier. Water sources were perilously scarce along that section of the Batân an-Sakal, making it necessary for Sakalkhâd and his Bozishnara allies to take out the Sorijan towns that guarded it one by one to secure a safe line of communications. And even if Khorsâj should come under Tumakveh control, even then the invaders would have to supply their armies by ship, a time-consuming process that would draw off much of their fleet from the fighting.

The Tulwanî knew this, and therefore staged a concerted defense of the region in the spring of 1258; but without the support of their naval forces the armies of Khorsâj and its neighboring towns were swiftly defeated by Sakalkhâd—and well it was for the Tumakveh king, for anything less than a decisive victory would have imperiled his army with starvation and lack of water. But with the capture of Khorsâj, the siege of Tulwang had begun.

Fighting on the Tulwang plateau raged throughout the remainder of the campaigning season with little success for the allied invaders. The tenacious defenders held their ground, utilizing the hardships imposed by the landscape on their enemies to disrupt their advance or divide their numbers. Of particular advantage to the Sorija was the fact that the southern cities of Tulwang that faced the open sea rather than the bay, though severely harried by the Gondorian privateers, were still free ports whose ships could sail south along the coasts of the Thânî Hazad in search of mercenaries and provisions to abet their cause. As yet the allies had no means of preventing this without abandoning their blockade of the Azra'm-Miraz and Tulwang's northern cities.

The tide began to turn in the following year, when Sakalkhâd's forces finally succeeded in penetrating the Teeth of Kanjar, the three most populous valleys of Tulwang's northern coast that lay opposite the Cape of Balkuzôr. Laying siege to the havens of Kanjar, the Tumakveh king ordered his son to advance one of Bellakar's three war-fleets against this region from the landward side.

Cut off now even from their fellow countrymen by Sakalkhâd's Bozishnara auxiliaries, who blocked all attempts of the southern cities to bring relief to Kanjar by land, the desperate pirates made a last-ditch effort to break the blockading Tumakveh fleet in a sea-battle. But now the corsairs were dangerously outnumbered, and though Kadarzagar was not an exceptionally skilled admiral, their swift coastal runners were no match for the Gondorian-designed warships of the Tumakveh.

The Battle of the Crimson Tide that followed obliterated the fleets of Kanjar, and by the close of the campaigning season all but a few of its cities had surrendered or were destroyed by the victorious allies. Most of northern Tulwang was now lost to the Sorija; the remaining havens along the Azra'm-Miraz were taken during the next year. The cities of southern Tulwang called for a truce in the autumn of 1259, promising to submit the issue of the conflict to the arbitration the Captain of Ships.

Satisfied with their victories and eager for a prompt resolution of the war (which was already greatly straining the resources of both nations), Sakalkhâd and the Bozishnarod agreed to the proposal. The Sorija too were anxious to cut their northern losses, being menaced anew by Anbalukkhôr, which had by then beaten back and punished the Adena and Sederi. Far away in Pelargir, Calimehtar was pleased to learn of the success of his league with the southern powers. He appointed his son, Calimir, then commanding the southern division of Gondor's fleet at Umbar, to act on his behalf in the settlement of Sorijan affairs.

THE PEACE OF TULWANG (TA 1260)

The Tumakveh monarch, an ambassador from the Dar and representatives of the southern cities of Tulwang gathered at Khorsâj in the spring of 1260 to receive Calimir and commence negotiations. Having given a hearing to the claims of all parties and considering carefully what arrangements would best ensure enduring stability for traffic on the sea and Gondor's allies, the son of Calimehtar judged that the Sorija should have peace on the following conditions:

The northern coast of Tulwang and its cities shall be subject to the hegemony of Bellakar and Bozisha-Dar, their respective possessions to be determined by mutual agreement. Southern Tulwang shall remain free, and neither the Tumakveh nor the Bozishnarod shall provoke war with its cities.

No Sorijan ship shall sail north of Cape Bishra, being the southwesternmost extremity of the Azra'm-Miraz, nor may the Sorija occupy the isle facing it with more than 12 decked ships.

Over a period of five years, the Tulwanî shall pay 20,000 pieces of gold to the Katedrala in reparation for violence perpetrated against the coastlands of Raj, and another 8,000 at once to the Tumakveh to allay expenses incurred by the support of Gondorian privateers in their land during the war.

The representatives of Tulwang accepted Calimir's terms and hastened back to their cities to confirm the settlement. Meanwhile, Calimehtar's son busied himself with the detailed disposition of lands and havens to the victors. It was agreed that the Dar should possess all the coasts as far as Khorsâj, whereas Bellakar would hold the Teeth of Kanjar and everything westwards to Cape Bishra. Both apportionments were substantial territorial gains which would give the allied powers absolute supremacy over the bay and preeminent control of the sea-ways south of Mardruak.

A still greater victory belonged to the Captain of Ships, whose cunning deployment of Gondor's resources had rid the sea of a large-scale piratical threat without the commitment of Gondorian naval forces. With the Azra'm-Miraz now firmly in the hands of his allies, Calimehtar had laid the foundation for a revival of the maritime prosperity Gondor had known under the Ship-kings, a prosperity in which Bellakar and Bozisha-Dar would share. But if the fortunes of Bellakar and other westward-looking realms now waxed and waned with the power of Gondor, other lands, far from the Sundering Sea, were being drawn into the orbit of powers as yet unknown to the West—powers of darkness whose reach would one day extend even to the Teeth of Kanjar.

THE SHADOW IN THE SOUTH (TA 1051-1338)

Many leagues to the east of Bellakar and Raj lay Sîrayn, a land watered by mighty rivers born under the rain shadow of the Yellow Mountains. The Sîranians, a Southron people, called this land home, dotting its verdant floodplain with seven well-built cities. Distant relatives of the Bozishnarod, the Men of Sîrayn were nourished by a sophisticated polytheism, the Tayé faith, concerned primarily with the preservation of social order and national identity.

That identity had once been threatened by imperial Númenor. After seventy years of bloody conquest, Herundil of Ciryatanórë divided Sîrayn into three provinces—Chennacatt, Isra and Kirmlesra—partitioning their governance to loyal captains. These held the Men of Sîrayn in subjection for nearly three centuries, seizing their wealth to feed the coffers of Númenórean avarice and pressing their sons to serve in Herundil's armies.

It made no difference to the Sîranians whether Herundil was the vassal of Armenelos or Tar-Raumoher the Storm King, ally of Mordor. When Herundil was finally crushed by Tar-Ancalimon in the War of the Renegades, the Men of Sîrayn rose against their overlords and cast aside the Númenórean yoke altogether. Subsequent attempts by the Bâitha'n-Khôrî to recover the eastern lands of Herundil's once great empire met with signal defeat. Númenor had come and gone, but the Sîranians remained.

Like all peoples of Haradwaith, the Men of Sîrayn knew of the might of Hyarmendacil, and of the splendor of Atanatar Alcarin, in whose reign "precious stones were pebbles in Gondor for children to play with." But to the Sîranians Gondor and its allies, for all their wars and their wealth, were but a distant rumor. "Let the heirs of Númenor rule in the West if they must rule somewhere," they said; "the East is ours."

Smug in their self-assurance, the Men of Sîrayn did not perceive the shadow that was even then sending forth its dark tendrils from a forgotten crag of the Yellow Mountains. In Chennacatt, at the source of the Sîresha, the very river whose waters gave Sîrayn life, a seed of evil was taking root. Herundil, the Storm King, had returned to haunt the lands he once ruled, bent on piecing together the fragments of a dream that had been shattered by Tar-Ancalimon more than two thousand years ago.

Now a bodiless wraith enslaved to the Lord of the Rings, the ghost of Herundil stalked the dark ruins of Ny Chennacatt, the mountain fastness that had been the citadel of Vaiwatan, his eastern viceroy. This subterranean stronghold had degenerated into a lair of Orcs and Trolls. Swiftly effecting the submission of these evil creatures, the Nazgûl contemplated how the reconquest of his empire was to be achieved.

Formidable obstacles stood in Herundil's path. The first was a lack of manpower. Orcs were serviceable enough for guarding mountain passes and short-range raiding expeditions, but they were virtually useless in lands ruled by the sun—in Haradwaith, Vatra reigned supreme. As a servant of the Shadow, Herundil might find eager recruits among the Ârûwanâi of the Southlands, but Anbalukkhôr, Khâradûnê and the Thânî Hazad lay far beyond his reach. The Black Númenórean realm of Tantûrak and the Sharaekian hillmen of Dûshera were closer neighbors, but too parochial to become the primary spawning ground for an invasionary force that would be required to march thousands of miles at Herundil's bidding. The only realistic source of soldiery available to Herundil were the Sîranians, and they cursed his memory.

Herundil's first scheme at winning them over was unsuccessful. Attempting a stratagem he had used to suppress a slave revolt in Nûrn as Sauron's taskmaster during the later Second Age, Herundil planned to unleash his monstrous minions upon Sîrayn, decimate its populace and then give the survivors the option of submitting to his rule as an alternative to total annihilation.

But the Sîranians were a free people, not Nûrniag slaves, and proved more resilient than the Nazgûl anticipated. A century of incessant Orkish raiding succeeded only in starving most of his minions and draining himself of sorcerous power. In order for his day-shy hosts to venture far from their mountain lairs, Herundil had to summon vast storm-clouds to block out the sun wherever they marched. The almost perpetual darkness accompanying these attacks disrupted the agriculture cycle on which the Sîranians depended for their existence. Were the Blind Sorcerer's machinations to continue, there would be no people left alive to serve him.

A total defeat of his Orkish army in 1201 by the Sîranian swords of Clan Másra persuaded Herundil to abandon his campaign. His Orcs fled back into the Yellow Mountains, his clouds receded, and the Storm King was given the next hundred and fifty years to ponder his own folly while convalescing in the privacy of Ny Chennacatt.

Herundil had blundered badly, but he had had the wisdom not to give out his right name. To be sure, the Men of Sîrayn spun endless tales about the return of the "Storm King" and the defeat of his hordes; but they had no idea how close to reality their mythmaking had become. For his part, the Nazgûl determined to keep it that way. If he was to use these one-time subjects as fodder for his dreams of conquest, Herundil would have to fabricate a new persona for himself, suppressing (at least for the present) the title of Storm King.

Although the Másra purged Sîrayn of Herundil's minions in 1201, the Sîranians were not able to dislodge his Orcs from Fhûl, a fortress that sat astride the entrance to the Boasiri, the strategic pass linking Chennacatt to lands south of the Yellow Mountains. Through Fhûl, Herundil's Orcs controlled access to the Yól Sari, a major trade route that mounted the Boasiri. The economy of the nearby Sîranian town of Tartaust was significantly damaged by this fact, as it was by the Orc-raids that were periodically launched against it from the surrounding mountains.

As his strength revived, Herundil stepped up this Orkish presence in the region, causing many Sîranians to abandon their homes. The Boasiri was fast becoming a menace to its neighbors on both sides of the mountains. The Men of Sîrayn called upon their rulers to amend the situation, but they failed in spite of some concerted campaigning by the warriors of Clan Másra.

Salvation came at last unexpectedly from out of the south. A small force of Ârûwanâi and Dûsheran hillmen, led by a captain named Akhôrahil, stormed Fhûl and drove out its Orkish inhabitants. Some of the victors occupied the fortress, others settled in Tartaust, befriending its remaining inhabitants and vowing to restore prosperity to Chennacatt. The newcomers sent emissaries to Mezin, Tarb of Tûl Isra, the Másra ruler of Sîrayn, explaining that their lord Akhôrahil, being greatly troubled by the infestation of the mountains, had taken up residence at Ny Chennacatt to ensure that the headwaters of the Sîresha remain free of evils. "Akhôrahil" was, of course, the Nazgûl Herundil in disguise; his Ârûwanâ and Sharaekian retainers, paid mercenaries from Dûshera; the defeat of the Orcs, a staged fight. The year was 1338.

The Tarb was delighted at this news and promptly sent representatives to secure friendly relations with his new neighbor and (more shrewdly) to negotiate affordable tolls and tariffs for the use of the Boasiri by Sîranian merchants. Similar embassies were received from Dâirukhôr, Prince of Dûshera, being comforted that a kinsman of his own race held this crucial frontier. The lord of Ny Chennacatt was accommodating to all requests, but his en-

voys impressed upon those who would have his good will that Akhôrahil needed men to help him maintain Chennacatt against the creatures of the mountains.

By this cunning charade Akhôrahil had overcome a major obstacle to his plans. He had established himself as an ostensibly benign presence at a strategically and economically important juncture of many realms, and he had given the Sîranians a reason to take up military service under his banner. That banner displayed a black dragon upon a red field, a device intended to match the dragon's head his Dûsheran stonewrights were shaping from the mountain-face of Ny Chennacatt. The host which would one day march under that banner into Tulwang and beyond took its name from this icon: Thôn an-Khârlôkh, the Army of the Southern Dragon.

THE ARMY OF THE SOUTHERN DRAGON (TA 1338-1398)

The formation of Akhôrahil's vast host (120,000 strong at its height) took the Nazgûl more than a half century to complete. Having administered the slave-fields of Nûrn for many mortal lives, Akhôrahil was well aware of the logistics of sustaining a large military force. The first thirty years of this process therefore concentrated almost exclusively on transforming the Chenna valley above Tartaust into terraced agricultural land capable of feeding an army.

To promote this, all who took up service with Akhôrahil (at this stage, mostly dislocated peasants or townsmen from the country round Tartaust) were given land to till and cultivate. As the population of the vale grew, so did the town of Tartaust, its stagnant economy gradually reviving and even surpassing its former prosperity. The army of Akhôrahil drew merchants, artisans and purveyors of all manner of diversion over the Boasiri, making Tartaust the most important caravansary in the Yellow Mountains.

Akhôrahil's open encouragement to settlement of the Chenna valley contrasted with a ruthless selection process for those who would actually garrison the Ringwraith's citadel. Those not found worthy of trust were rejected. These either vanished without a trace or returned to their homes unable to recall anything of their visit to Ny Chennacatt. This phenomenon continued for some years until all of the most sensitive positions were filled. After that, Akhôrahil would be less discriminating, otherwise it might take him centuries to build up the numbers he required to undertake his campaigns.

Orcs and Trolls were now employed only sparingly. Akhôrahil allowed them to infest the mountains in the immediate vicinity of Ny Chennacatt and Fhûl, but direct ties to these creatures were suppressed, except within the depths of Ny Chennacatt where they continued to mine and delve the Nazgûl's citadel, coming into contact with only the most trusted of Akhôrahil's servants.

During these years, Akhôrahil found a general for his fledgling army in Dulgu, renegade son of Dâirukhôr of Dûshera. Dulgu "the Black" had shown himself sufficiently ruthless to warrant Akhôrahil's trust, and in 1367 the lord of Ny Chennacatt commanded him to re-garrison Fhûl and expand recruitment throughout Chennacatt and Isra. The response of the Sîranians was enthusiastic from many quarters (not surprising, given the benefits Akhôrahil's control of the Boasiri had brought to Tartaust), and prospective swords began to flock to the gates of Fhûl.

The reaction of the Isran authorities was otherwise. Settling disenfranchised peasants on a mountain frontier was one thing; drawing upon the source of another realm's levies was quite another matter. The lords of Isra, and especially its Tarb, were wary of allowing the lord of Ny Chennacatt to grow too powerful. Though pleased with the pacification of the Yellow Mountains, the rulers of Sîrayn did not sit comfortably with Black Númenórean neighbors, however open-handed. In 1370, Clan Másra persuaded Mezin Tarb to issue an edict setting limits to the number of Israns Akhôrahil could accept annually into his service.

Cautious to avoid antagonizing the hand that fed him, Akhôrahil at first diplomatically complied with Mezin's demands. But the terms of the Tarb's edict brought the Nazgûl's recruitment schedule to a virtual standstill. Mezin and his supporters would have to be eliminated. Lacking any strong foothold in Sîrayn beyond the boundaries of Chennacatt, but well-informed by those Israns already in his employ, Akhôrahil spent the next five years quietly probing the hearts of Clan Másra's chief political rival, Clan Bulgan.

One family of that clan in particular, the House of Izain, held out great prospect for an unholy alliance with the lord of Ny Chennacatt. Bazaud Izain, the head of that family, was amenable to Akhôrahil's suggestion of a pact of mutual advantage. The Thôn an-Khârlôkh would assist Clan Bulgan in seizing power if Bazaud would reverse Mezin's edict. To ensure that the new government would act in concert with Akhôrahil's interests, Tartas Izain, a close relative of Bazaud and already a budding sorcerer, was to be sent to Ny Chennacatt for the completion of his training.

The conditions of this conspiracy were agreed upon in 1375; they were acted upon five years later. A bloody coup took place in Tûl Isra in Ishat 1380, and in only six days Bazaud Izain held the reins of government. The Army of the Southern Dragon did not actually take part in the fighting. Instead, Dulgu led a force from Fhûl and sat menacingly on the banks of the Maudar river opposite Tûl Isra, cowing any who sought to come to Clan Másra's defense. More direct assistance was had from the Slayers, a cadre of Half-troll assassins Akhôrahil had formed to dispatch "obstacles" to his will. One of these was responsible for the murder of Mezin Tarb.

With the Bulgan in power, the whole of Sîrayn was opened to Akhôrahil's recruiters, and the size of his army grew accordingly. These developments brought Akhôrahil's scheme to two important thresholds. The first, epitomized by Dulgu's restraint during the Bulgan coup, was a threshold of inactivity. For thirteen years now Akhôrahil had been engaged in the intense recruitment of a soldiery which, although well-paid, had been given no foe to fight. This had to change if Akhôrahil expected to sustain his troops' commitment to their employer.

The second threshold reached by the Thôn an-Khârlôkh under Bulgan supremacy in Sîrayn was material. The agricultural land about Ny Chennacatt and Fhûl enabled the basic garrisons of those fortresses self-sufficiency, but it could not sustain an army of 120,000 (a goal which Akhôrahil was still a long way from reaching). The Nazgûl would have to extend the boundaries of his territory. Happily, this would kill two birds with one stone, since expansion meant war.

Two arenas presented themselves as trials for the Thôn an-Khârlôkh. To the west lay Tulwang, the first objective of his reconquest. But before Akhôrahil could invade that country his army would have to accomplish an epic march of three hundred leagues, skirting the fertile strip of valleys that marked the northern foothills of the Yellow Mountains. But the lord of Ny Chennacatt did not command the loyalty of the wild hillmen who inhabited these vales. These would have to be pacified or destroyed. Either way, westward expansion would secure more arable land to feed and house his growing host.

Due south of the Boasiri sprawled the Ârûwanâ realm of Tantûrak and its Dûsheran marches. Beyond Tantûrak lay northern Ûsakan, Gan and the savannas of Mûmakan. Dûshera was

fair game for the Thôn an-Khârlôkh, being inhabited mainly by rebellious Sharaekian vassals of Tantûrak. The fertile mountain valleys of Gan and Ûsakan, with their towers and fortified towns, were similarly open for periodic raiding.

But Tantûrak itself Akhôrahil would not attack. In a campaign aiming to win over Ârûwanâ realms to his rule, it would not do to display unprovoked antagonism against other Ârûwanâi. Mûmakan likewise was currently the domain of the Nazgûl Indûr (masquerading as Jí Amáv III, god-king of the Mûmakanril). The Lord of the Rings would tolerate no quarrels among his wraith-slaves.

But Akhôrahil was not out to pick fights with sympathetic neighbors. He wanted to control the Yellow Mountains. This left ample frontiers for the army of Fhûl to reduce and occupy. In addition to Dûshera, there was the adjoining hill country of Gan to the southeast and Ûsakan to the southwest. Ûsakan in particular offered a secondary approach to the western realms of the Ârûwanâi, by the Twin Gap linking it to Khâradûnê. Unlike the western advance towards Tulwang, however, the operations of the Thôn an-Khârlôkh in the south concentrated on raiding for slaves, forage and booty rather than actual occupation of land (apart from a few key fortified towns and towers near mountain passes). Slaves won from these raids formed the primary labor force of Akhôrahil's army, males for the construction of the fortresses, females to serve the pleasure of the soldiery.

All these ventures helped assure Akhôrahil's army the cohesion it would need in the great campaigns to come, while keeping soldiers battle-hardened and devoted to their chiefs. By the time the muster for the Tulwang campaign arrived, an entirely new martial culture had evolved. The bulk of Akhôrahil's Sîranian soldiery could look back with pride to days of old when their grandfathers or great-grandfathers first entered the service of Ny Chennacatt. They looked forward with anticipation to the "Glorious War" their fathers had told them tales of in their childhood.

THE GATHERING STORM (TA 1398)

Eighteen years after Bazaud Izain's seizure of power in Sîrayn, Akhôrahil's army had achieved numbers which the wraith-lord deemed sufficient to undertake his designs against the West. In the summer of 1398, raiding activities in Zajantak and the south suddenly ceased. The Army of the Southern Dragon was assembling at Ny Chennacatt.

As Akhôrahil marshaled his troops, he drew them up as Vaiwatan, his conquering general of the Second Age, had arrayed his forces—by the four winds of storm. Each wind-host, 30,000 strong, was assigned a sphere of operation: the task of holding Zajantak was given to the North Wind, the defense of Chennacatt to the East, and the frontiers of Ûsakan, Dûshera and Gan to the South.

To the West Wind was given the honor of conducting the Glorious War. Dulgu the Black, high warlord of the Thôn an-Khârlôkh, would be its general, seconded by Barzek Zern of Clan Bulgan. Now 71, the one-time Dûsheran renegade had become a grizzled veteran of over forty years experience. "Caja the Snake" his troops called him, boasting that he had outwitted and defeated more than twenty-five enemy generals in his day. But Dulgu's "day" was not yet over. He had waited most of his life for this campaign. Born into an age of lesser Men, Dulgu did not share the blessing of Vaiwatan's longevity, but he intended to prove himself the equal of his legendary predecessor even in his advanced years.

Under Dulgu's command would march a cavalry of 15,000 horse and camel-riders (the latter exceptionally suited for warfare on Tulwang's arid plateau) supported by 10,000 infantry and 1,000 *mûmakil* from the Sára Bask. Elephants had never before been used for warfare in the western realms of Haradwaith, and Dulgu hoped they would give his army added shock value. Including specialist contingents, allied auxiliaries and camp followers, Dulgu would be leading a host well in excess of 45,000, the largest organized military force to trouble the seaward lands in nearly three thousand years.

But Akhôrahil knew that Tulwang could not be taken without the control or at least the cooperation of his former core territory of Anbalukkhôr. Not only was a seaborne ally needful to counter the fleets of Tulwang and its hegemons; the fertile basin of the Balakurush river was essential as a source for provisioning so vast a host in the deserts of Tulwang. For this reason Akhôrahil humbled his pride and sent an emissary to treat with the lord who now sat upon "his" throne at Zadan an-Adûn.

This was Pharazbâr the Golden, lesser scion of Zimrubâr the Great (whose fleet the Tumakveh had vanquished at the Battle of Corals four hundred years ago). Since the Peace of Tulwang in 1260, Anbalukkhôrian prestige had been decisively eclipsed by Bellakar and Raj. Anbalukkhôr's supremacy south of Tulwang had also declined. The Tumakveh and the Bozishnarod were now the dominant trading partners of the Thânî Hazad, and an indecisive war twenty years ago with Khâradûnê had not improved Pharazbâr's prospects on that front.

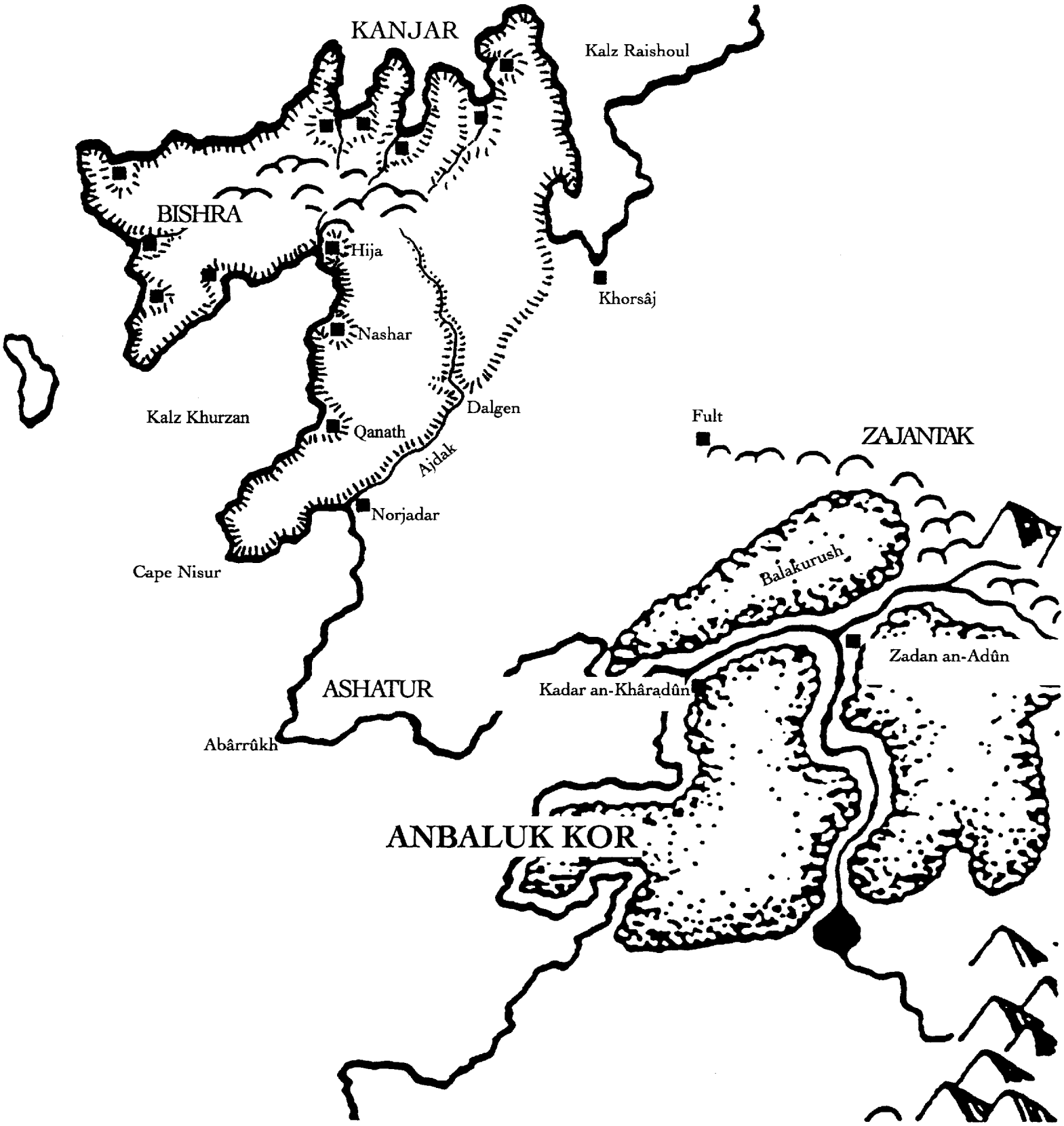
Despite the need for delicate diplomacy, Akhôrahil commanded his envoy to declare himself before Pharazbâr as the Voice of Ârû an-Bawîb, the Storm King, thus making plain to the Ârûwanâ king what mantle and legacy the lord of Ny Chennacatt was laying claim to. But the Storm King's message to Pharazbâr was to be an invitation to glory, not a threat to usurp the rule of Anbalukkhôr (well, not yet). Akhôrahil needed ships to help fight Anbalukkhôr's old foes to the north, in return for which Pharazbâr's rule would be extended over half of Tulwang.

Though wary of this new power in the East who made such bold claims about himself, the lord of Anbalukkhôr accepted the Storm King's proposal, preferring the opportunity of attacking his natural enemies to creating a new one. Akhôrahil's ambassadors to Khâradûnê and the Thânî Hazad were less successful, due to the enmity of these realms toward Anbalukkhôr and their unwillingness to take part in another northern fiasco. To the Ârûwanâi of the west, the Army of the Southern Dragon remained an unknown quantity of dubious faith.

THE FIRST TULWANG CAMPAIGN (TA 1399)

As the Tumakveh and the Bozishnarod had learned more than two hundred years before, no large-scale land campaign against Tulwang could succeed without the control of one of its southern ports: Khorsâj or Norjadar. Without a secure, uninterrupted flow of provisions, no army, however puissant, could survive for long upon Tulwang's barren plateau that guarded its northern coastal valleys, if its ways were barred by the Tulwanî. But Khorsâj would be of no use to Akhôrahil's forces as far as provisioning was concerned, since it stood beside a bay jointly controlled by the Men of Bellakar and Raj. Only by first seizing and holding Norjadar would victory come within the Storm King's grasp.

This was to be the task of Anbalukkhôr's fleet. Because rumor of the westward march of the Thôn an-Khârlôkh would reach Tulwang and its neighbors long before the army itself did, Pharazbâr had to act quickly. The attack came late in 1398, while Akhôrahil was still mustering his troops at Ny Chennacatt. The Anbalukkhôrians assailed Norjadar suddenly by land and sea under the command of Pharazbâr's son, Sakulbâr, capturing it in the



midst of the storm season (a ploy which gave the Anbalukkhôrian prince the advantage of surprise, but also cost him many ships).

Spring brought with it Tulwanian reprisal, but no movement from the lords of Azra'm-Miraz. Though an important port-city, Norjadar was far removed from the Bay of Tulwang, beyond whose coasts neither the Tumakveh nor the Katedrala showed much interest. Nevertheless, the enmity of the Sorija was not something to be faced lightly. Norjadar's allies soon had the Anbalukkhôrians on the defensive. Fortunately for the city's captors, relief was on the way.

Dulgu and Barzek Zern led their hosts out of Ny Chennacatt on the 9th of Dahlat, 1399, advancing with ruthless efficiency across the long leagues of Zajantak in just over a month's time. On 16 Najam, the West Wind of the Storm King reached the oasis of

Fult (the site of Vaiwatan's ignominious defeat at the hands of Tar-Ancalimon's forces in SA 2280). Poised upon the frontier of southern Tulwang, the Army of the Southern Dragon was re-provisioned there by their allies in Anbalukkhôr. The Black Númenórean warlord and his Bulgan *tarabett* then divided the host, Barzek advancing west into the vale of the River Ajdak above Norjadar, Dulgu leading his forces north towards Khorsâj.

By now report of the massive, westward-marching legions had spread throughout Tulwang and Bozisha-Miraz, making its way even to the Tumakveh court at Nîlûlondê. Ûrêzagar, the great-grandson of Sakalkhâd (hero of the Second Sorijan War), ruled the Bellakaranî at this time. Now in his fifties, Ûrêzagar entrusted the command of Bellakar's forces to his doughty son, Urshuzîr.

There was little time to take counsel—nor would it have availed them much, as neither the Tumakveh nor the Katedrala had any certain knowledge of this mysterious enemy's intentions. But whatever should betide, this much was clear: their possessions along the southern coast of Azra'm-Miraz must be guarded from assault. Urshuzîr commanded Azrakhâd, *aʒapthubêth* of Nykkea, to mobilize the fleet of Mardruak and meet him at Korlea with all speed.

Having received news of the Southern Dragon's serpentine approach well in advance of the Tumakveh, the lords of the Dar dispatched 500 picked Visi to strengthen Khorsâj and 4,000 Gusar clansmen to patrol its hinterland. Little did the Katedrala comprehend how insufficient this (to them quite substantial) sending force would be against what had now become the most powerful war machine in southern Middle-earth.

On 22 Najam, Dulgu's Farat, the cavalry of the Thôn an-Khârlôkh, now 10,000 strong (the rest having accompanied Barzek to the Ajdak), pulverized the Gusar in a pitched battle only three leagues from the gates of Khorsâj. Lured into a circle of mounted Chennan cataphracts whose armor their arrows could not penetrate, the horsemen of the Brij-Mijesec collapsed under a hail of missiles loosed upon them from the towering parapets of the Mûmakat (the elephant-riders of Sîrayn). This shocking defeat quickly sobered up Khorsâj's defenders. The Visi took command of the city's defense, having already made preparations for the eventuality of a siege, and sent word by ship to the towns along the Batân an-Sakal for assistance.

But here too the Bozishnarod underestimated the power of their adversary—Caja the Snake had many weapons and many hands to wield them. The Warlord of the West Wind had marched within sight of Khorsâj's walls with only a tithe of his forces, commanding the main body to wait three days at Fult before following him. Thinking that their attackers had numbers sufficient to besiege the city and no more, the messengers the Visi had sent along the coast brought no tidings of the multitudes that poured into the country around Khorsâj three days later. These Dulgu directed to occupy a narrow neck of the Batân an-Sakal a few miles east of Khorsâj, so that any attempt to bring aid to the beleaguered city by land would be effectively blocked.

As Dulgu commenced the siege of Khorsâj, Barzek Zern was leading the other half of the West Wind into the Ajdak vale with a view to securing the Crossings of Dalgen. These fords, which lay twenty leagues upriver from Norjadar, were the gateway to the plateau of northern Tulwang and therefore had to be occupied if the Storm King's designs were to succeed.

Well aware of this, the Tulwanî hastened to fend off Akhôrahil's forces. This was made difficult, however, by Sakulbâr's occupation of Norjadar, the only Tulwanian city within a week's march of Dalgen. The Sorijan fleet, attempting to recapture Norjadar, was abetted by land forces sent from its sister-cities along the Kalz Khurzan, the bay that followed the Tulwanian coast north of Cape Nisur. These auxiliaries were primarily light infantry supported by the Gettaniya, nomadic tribesmen who wandered the rocky Ashatur peninsula that formed the frontier between Anbalukkhôr and southern Tulwang. The Gettaniya had no love for the Ârûwanâi, and were only too happy for an excuse to join forces with the Men of Tulwang against them—for the right price.

So when Gettaniyan scouts brought word of Barzek's march on Ajdak and the Tulwanî at last perceived what these invaders were trying to do, the besiegers of Norjadar had no choice but to lift their siege and race to defend the Crossings of Dalgen, the Sorija redoubling their seaward assault in order to dissuade Sakulbâr from sending a foray against the rear of their countrymen hastening up the Ajdak. But Barzek Zern needed no such help from the Anbalukkhôrians. With a Sîranian phalanx of 5,000 and a cavalry of 3,000 horse, 2,000 camel and 700 war-elephants under the *tarabett*'s command, the prospects of the Tulwanî and their Gettaniyan allies were no better than those of Khorsâj's defenders.

The Khurzan infantry ensconced itself at Dalgen, digging trenches and raising earthworks to stymie the enemy's charge. But the Mûmakat made mincemeat of these paltry barricades, scattering the Tulwanî or crushing them beneath the feet of their walking fortresses. The Gettaniyan horsemen, more sensible than their Gusar counterparts, avoided a direct clash with Barzek's well-organized host, and their tactics were consequently limited to harassment from a distance and screening maneuvers to cover the retreat of the few Tulwanî who managed to escape. They fled to Norjadar, bearing tales of the might of the Southern Dragon to their Sorijan comrades.

The *tarabett* dispatched a third of his forces to pursue the fugitives, sending messages also to Pharazbâr to send the main body of the Anbalukkhôrian fleet to lift the siege of Norjadar so that the movement of supplies from Kadar an-Khâradûn could begin. Barzek meanwhile set his remaining troops to constructing fortified camps on both sides of the Ajdak to hold the Dalgen Crossings. Additional camps were established every ten miles along the south bank of the river in order to ensure an uninterrupted line of defense for what would become the umbilical of the Southern Dragon's march across the plateau of Tulwang.

By this time the naval forces of Bellakar had set sail from Korlea under Azrakhâd of Nykkea and Prince Urshuzîr, landing an impressive number of troops in the ports of Kanjar and Bishra on 10 Manjaz. There the Tumakveh commanders learned that Khorsâj was under siege and that Tulwanian efforts to liberate Norjadar had failed. Since their chief strength lay in naval superiority, Urshuzîr and Azrakhâd decided to divide their fleets. The Tumakveh prince sailed the main body of Korlea and Balkuzôr's ships round the Bishra to break the enemy's hold on Norjadar. The admiral of Mardruak meanwhile would transport their land forces to relieve Khorsâj.

The coming to the Tumakveh navy to Norjadar and Khorsâj brought new hope to the defenders of Tulwang. Dulgu had now left Khorsâj, entrusting the city's reduction to Barzek while he moved his forces onto the plateau. The *tarabett* was eager to be done with the siege so that he could join his warlord on the main campaign, but the conveyance of supplies from Fult was a slow and laborious process, whereas Khorsâj's defenders had easy access to provisions thanks to their control of the sea.

The arrival of Urshuzîr's fleet before the beleaguered port of Norjadar had more immediate consequences. The Sorija of Khurzan were inspired to renew their attack on the city, in spite of the danger now looming above their own havens, thinking that their old enemies from Bellakar would be able to turn the tide in their favor. Now, however, with his garrison strengthened by the Thôn an-Khârlôkh, Sakulbâr was ready for a sea-battle.

Indeed, the prince of Anbalukkhôr had no choice but to challenge his adversaries, since sea-access to Norjadar was now essential to victory. Sakulbâr was a daring captain, but his ships were no match for the combined fleets of Bellakar and Khurzan. Pharazbâr, his father, knew this, and had no intention of allowing his son to stand alone. As Urshuzîr and the Sorija engaged Sakulbâr's fleet off Cape Nisur, the main Anbalukkhôrian armada lay hidden behind the promontory of Abârrûkh, waiting for the battle to be drawn into the Bay of Norjadar so that the enemy could be trapped from behind.

The ploy succeeded, the attackers having no inkling that Pharazbâr had committed the full strength of his navy against them. Urshuzîr and his allies were now under attack from two sides, and the arms of the firth had grown too narrow for them to turn and face their new foes without great loss of ships and men. Nonetheless, the Tumakveh prince hazarded this, seeing no other chance of saving his men. Commanding his own vessel and others of his escort to turn their hulls broadside against the oncoming Anbalukkhôrians, Urshuzîr shielded the swiftest Sorijan galleys, urging them to form a spearhead and cut a path to freedom.

Marveling at the nobility of the Tumakveh's sacrifice, the Khurzan mariners launched their attack. Many Sorija perished in that headlong onset; but their blood was well-spent, for several ships, Bellakarian and Sorijan alike, escaped the Ârûwanâ trap. Alas, Urshuzîr did not escape. His ship was among the first to be broadsided by the steel-spined rams of the Anbalukkhôrians. The allies of the Storm King had won the day.

The survivors of Kalâb an-Phazân, the "Prince's Fall," arrived in Khorsâj on 22 Manjaz. Azrakhâd was distraught with grief at the news of Urshuzîr's death and of the defeat at Norjadar, but could not seek to avenge his lord without abandoning the charge Urshuzîr had laid upon him: to defend Khorsâj. But he dispatched messengers to Nîlûlondê, bearing these sad tidings and entreating the king to declare his will—should the fleet remain in Kanjar and Khorsâj, or should they seek to redress the shame of Kalâb an-Phazân in Norjadar?

Urshuzîr's death was a grievous blow to Ûrêzagar's heart. Not only was he robbed of his son, Bellakar was now robbed of an heir to the throne—a masterful man well able to lead his country through troubled times. Urshuzîr had a son, Êruhil, but he was a mere lad of eleven summers. The fate of the Bellakarian venture into Tulwang lay with Azrakhâd alone. Therefore the king vested the admiral of Mardruak with supreme authority in Tulwang, to conduct the war as seemed best to him.

By the time Ûrêzagar's messengers returned to Azrakhâd at Khorsâj on the 3rd of Vetrashu, Dulgu's campaign was in full-swing. United for the first time since the Second Sorijan War, the cities of northern Tulwang put up a determined resistance, forcing the Storm King's legions to pay dearly for every step of their advance. But as had been shown at Khorsâj and Dalgen, the Army of the Southern Dragon was all but invincible on the open battlefield if encountered at its full strength.

The Tulwanî were not a martial race, and as the difficulty of the terrain shielded their country from most landward threats, their strength in warfare was invested most in their Sorijan fleets. Their ability to counter the march of a massive, organized, well-provisioned invader was therefore limited. They could use the forbidding landscape of the plateau to their advantage, but so long as Akhôrahil's allies held Norjadar and the Ajdak, no obstacle would be permanent.

The Warlord of the West Wind had, in fact, already penetrated and captured three of the five Tulwanian ports ringing the Kalz Khurzan, opening to him new provisioning depots. But he did not abandon Norjadar for any turn of battle, knowing that the Crossings of Dalgen were the only true point of retreat for his land-bound forces should the tides of fate turn against them. The Tulwanians that came into his power—Nashar, Hija and Qanath—were shown mercy (the Storm King did not want to rule over a land of ghosts), and their cities were handed over to the Anbalukkhôrians. But any warships Dulgu found he burned to ensure that the Sorija could not use them against Norjadar. Not many ships were burnt, since most Sorija who did not die in the defense of their havens took sail and fled to Bishra or Kanjar, there to carry on the fight with their countrymen.

As for Khorsâj, Barzek had made little headway on that front thanks to the steadfastness of Azrakhâd. But additional forces had recently arrived from the Dar, giving the Tumakveh admiral space to consider the choices that now lay before him. He could stay in Khorsâj, but it had become clear to him that this city was not the object of the invader, except as a means of preventing him from achieving anything. He could throw all of Bellakar's strength into the defense of the Teeth of Kanjar, but that would not drive the Southern Dragon out of Tulwang. One choice remained to Azrakhâd: to turn the might of Bellakar and the Sorija against the Anbalukkhôrian fleet at Norjadar and force the enemy to abandon northern Tulwang.

This last course Azrakhâd chose. Mobilizing his fleet, the *aswapthubêth* of Nykkea withdrew from Khorsâj, sailing west. In Kanjar and Bishra he rallied to his banner all Sorija that would hearken to his summons, and soon he rounded Cape Bishra with a great armada to challenge the might of Anbalukkhôr.

Azrakhâd's first task was to liberate the ports of Khurzan, and on 12 Vetrashu his fleet engaged the Anbalukkhôrian-held cities. Turning the enemy's strategy against him, the Tumakveh admiral held his own fleet back initially, so that the Anbalukkhôrians would think that only the Sorija were attacking them. This trick succeeded in drawing their ships into a naval engagement on the Kalz Khurzan.

The sudden appearance on the bay of the navy of Bellakar took the mariners of Anbalukkhôr by surprise. Striking at the signal-fire sent from Azrakhâd's flagship, the Bellakarian fleet trapped the Ârûwanâi by the same ploy that had robbed them of Urshuzîr. Within hours, many Anbalukkhôrian defenders had perished, while those garrisoning the havens of Khurzan sought to burn Nashar and Qanath in desperation, bent on whatever harm they might do to the Tulwanî before they themselves were destroyed.

Azrakhâd was anxious to press on to Norjadar, but ere he set sail for Cape Nisur, San-Ishtu, one of his captains from Mardruak, counseled a cunning stratagem. Many of the Anbalukkhôrian ships they had defeated at Khurzan had been spared the torch (to provide new ships for the Tulwanî). San-Ishtu proposed to man these vessels with their own marines, and so strike the Anbalukkhôrians at unawares. Consenting to this audacious plan, Azrakhâd arranged the manning of the enemy ships and sent them in the van, past Nisur into the Bay of Norjadar, while he followed with the remainder of his fleet (as though pursuing them).

Once again the Anbalukkhôrians were deceived. Pharazbâr himself was now personally overseeing the conveyance of supplies to Norjadar, and when he beheld his own ships in flight before the Tumakveh fleet, he formed a battle line to receive the fugitives and confront the enemy. But when the Anbalukkhôrian galleys from Khurzan suddenly turned upon their countrymen, Pharazbâr's line was thrown into confusion, enabling Azrakhâd to close in for the kill.

Totally unprepared to find the enemy within their own ranks, the Anbalukkhôrians were worsted. Azrakhâd himself slew Pharazbâr, thus avenging the death of Urshuzîr. This crushed the will of the Black Númenórean fleet, which scattered and dispersed, some east to their prince at Norjadar, others south to the safety of their homeland.

News of Pharazbâr's death and the seizure of their supply route caused Barzek Zern great consternation. He at once departed Dalgen with a strong force of cavalry and rode to Norjadar, where he found the port blockaded by Azrakhâd's fleet. The disastrous turn of events had put Sakulbâr on the defensive, but the Anbalukkhôrian prince (and now heir apparent) as yet held the upper hand, since the attackers had no means of landing troops for a ground assault.

The *tarabett* was far from pleased with Sakulbâr's performance. Unless the Anbalukkhôrians could be coaxed into facing the Tumakveh fleet at sea, the Tulwang campaign was at an end. The prince, however, was fast losing inspiration for this war in which the ships of Anbalukkhôr were being used as fodder-bearers and now as fodder themselves so that an uncertain ally might settle upon their borders. The death of his father gave new weight to these misgivings. While he fought on vainly to defend Norjadar, a rival pretender might seize power in Zadan an-Adûn.

Barzek was not unaware of the danger of defection by his Anbalukkhôrian allies (his real reason for coming to Norjadar), and after uttering threats to the prince, placed Sakulbâr under close surveillance. The Anbalukkhôrians had had enough. Taking matters into their own hands, they set fire to their own ships that lay then in haven at Norjadar and used the distraction to butcher Sakulbâr's new "bodyguard" and escape the city by horse. The enraged *tarabett* ordered a company of Farat to pursue them, but Barzek knew in his heart that there would be no chance of winning back the Anbalukkhôrians in time to save Norjadar, even if a more pliable monarch could eventually be found. The war was lost.

Dispatching his swiftest errand-riders to bring word to Dulgu, Barzek continued to hold out at Norjadar. When the Warlord of the West Wind heard of the reversal at Norjadar, he executed all but two of the errand-riders on the spot. With the survivors he sent back a grim messenger—one of Akhôrahil's Slayers—to "convey his displeasure" to the *tarabett*. It was a death warrant. Caja the Snake did not tolerate failure.

Dulgu ordered the withdrawal of the West Wind from Khorsâj and Norjadar in order to shield the retreat of the main host. A beaten Army of the Southern Dragon crossed the River Ajdak at Dalgen on 6 Ishat, abandoning Tulwang for the mountain vales of Zajantak, where Dulgu would spend the remainder of the year in bitterness for the thwarting of his life's dream. With Norjadar lost and Anbalukkhôr's cooperation dubious, the conquest of Tulwang could take years—even centuries—and Dulgu was not immortal. The "Glorious War" that Akhôrahil had spent the past two centuries preparing had now become a glorious thorn in the Ringwraith's side.

THE LONG WAR (TA 1399-1436)

The retreat of the Thôn an-Khârlôkh late in the spring of 1399 was cause for celebration. The united strength of Tulwang, Raj and Bellakar had turned back the greatest threat to the Free Peoples of the Southlands, and without any request for assistance from Gondor. Heralds were sent far and wide to proclaim their victory, and many embassies returned bearing congratulations and accolades. Castamir son of Calimir, now Captain of Ships in Pelargir, was particularly moved by the news, seeing in this triumph the flowering of his father's wisdom, whose seeds Calimir had sown with the Peace of Tulwang.

But not all was rejoicing and merry-making. The allied powers of Azra'm-Miraz had weathered only the first onset of the Southern Dragon. Azrakhâd left a sizable Tumakveh garrison at Norjadar under the command of a trusted lieutenant, and gave orders for the erection of a fortress to guard the Crossings of Dalgen against future threats. Construction of this stronghold, Abâr-zadan, commenced late in the year and was completed before the following spring. It was built upon the foundations of Barzek Zern's camp, and was likewise supported by a line of smaller forts along the Ajdak joining it to Norjadar. The entire system of fortifications was to be manned by the Bellakarian navy in concert with Tulwanî and Sorija from Khurzan.

Ûrêzagar's willingness to commit a permanent force in southern Tulwang a hundred leagues away from Bellakarian soil signaled a dramatic expansion of the Tumakveh dynasty's hegemonic position in western Haradwaith. With Norjadar firmly in its hands, Bellakar achieved a mastery over the sea-lanes from Mardruak to the borders of Anbalukkhôr. The Ârûwanâi still ruled the Utter South, but from Tulwang northwards, more than a thousand miles of coastland lay under the protection of Gondor's favored ally.

For the moment, the foes of Tulwang were preoccupied with the threat each now posed to the other. Sakulbâr was busy securing his accession and frantically reorganizing his military forces to defend his realm against the possibility of attacks from sea and from the Yellow Mountains. He had broken faith with the Storm King, and was expecting the worse.

In this case, however, Sakulbâr's fears were needless. If it would not be his ally, Akhôrahil at least needed Anbalukkhôr's neutrality. An invasion of Anbalukkhôr at this stage might even provoke Sakulbâr to join forces with Tulwang (just as the Sorija had done with their one-time enemies from Bellakar). At any event, Sakulbâr would not rule Anbalukkhôr forever. In good time a lord of that realm might arise who would look upon the Southern Dragon as a desired ally (or a necessary evil). Akhôrahil could wait.

In the meantime, the West Wind had to be settled into its winter quarters in Zajantak. Dulgu appointed a lieutenant, Garlin of Clan Bulgan, to act as *tarabett* in his absence while he undertook the onerous task of returning to Ny Chennacatt to give an account of his deeds under the baleful regard of his dread lord. Dulgu got better than he expected from the Storm King, departing Akhôrahil's throneroom with both his life and his rank intact.

Even the Ringwraith had to concede the inevitability of defeat once Anbalukkhôr's fleet had failed them, and Dulgu was still too valuable a tool to cast aside, despite his years. The First Tulwang Campaign had served as a test of the strengths of his foes in the west; now he must probe their weaknesses. Leaving his erstwhile Ârûwanâ allies to lick their wounds, the Storm King decided to wait.

For the Army of the Southern Dragon, "waiting" still entailed fighting—seasonal forays into the lands of their enemies, punctuated by an occasional larger-scale invasion where conditions were favorable. But if Akhôrahil were to maintain the West and North Winds in the same region, he had to multiply their frontiers of war. While Anbalukkhôr remained closed, Tulwang did not offer enough resources and booty to sustain two raiding armies.

The only frontier left was Bozisha-Miraz. The lands of Raj would be the field of winter actions for the North Wind while the West continued its assault against Tulwang. Dulgu would remain in Chennacatt to oversee other designs of the Storm King unless a major campaign in Tulwang or Bozisha-Miraz were planned. For less important operations, Garlin would act as supreme commander of the West Wind.

To his credit and enduring fame, Dulgu the Black, greatest general of the Storm King since Vaiwatan, led the West Wind into battle twice more before his death: once in 1403 and again in 1408. Both campaigns won him noteworthy victories, but neither achieved their ultimate goal. The first resulted in the brief capture of Abâr-zadan on the Ajdak, followed by eleventh hour appeals to

Sakulbâr to retake Norjadar and erase the ignominy of his previous desertion. But the lord of Anbalukkhôr was unmoved, still recovering the military strength his realm had known under Pharazbâr his father. Dulgu responded by abandoning the Crossings of Dalgen and going on a rampaging slash and burn campaign along the northern borders of Sakulbâr's realm.

By 1408, even Dulgu's enemies were awed at the vigor and determination of this aging warrior—the strength of Dulgu's Númenórean blood kept him hale and battle-ready even at 81. In that year he led the Host of the West Wind against Khorsâj and finally took the city. Though the road to northern Tulwang remained barred to him, the Batân an-Sakal was not.

Having been lent a cadre of shipwrights and sailors by the King of Tantûrak in exchange for the South Wind's cooperation in helping him put down a Sharaekian revolt in Dûshera, Dulgu intended to build a fleet at Khorsâj capable of supplying his army on an invasion of Raj, following the southern coast of the Azra'm-Miraz, while the *tarabett* of the West Wind campaigned against southern Tulwang in order to guard his back and hopefully draw off some of the Tumakveh and Sorijan fleets to Norjadar.

But the warlord's schemes were doomed to failure. Even with half of their ships speeding south to strengthen Norjadar against the West Wind, the united fleets of Azra'm-Miraz were too powerful to resist or avoid. Dulgu's supply ships were sunk or captured long before his invasionary force reached the frontiers of Bozisha-Miraz. Trapped on the desert coast of an undrinkable sea, Dulgu's men had no choice but to press onward in hopes of reaching the Brij-Mijesec before they died of hunger and thirst.

Before that hour came they were confronted with Narodbrijig horsemen who had not forgotten the slaughter of their Gusar brethren before the walls of Khorsâj. A fierce battle ensued in which Dulgu and his bodyguard were separated from the Mûmakat line and cut down with scimitars. The rest of the invaders, weakened by their death march, were swiftly dispatched. The bodies of Dulgu's soldiers were burnt, but the warlord himself was laid to rest in the parched earth, and his grave was marked by a stone inscribed with the words: *Here lies Caja the Snake. He will strike no more.*

No major invasion of the west was attempted by the Storm King for the next sixteen years. Garlin of Clan Bulgan was named Warlord of the Thôn an-Khârlôkh in place of Dulgu. But he did not command the West Wind. That was left to another Bulgan named Trabain. Akhôrahil had other plans for Garlin. In 1408, Bazaud Izain, Tarb of Sîrayn, was old. A successor was needed, and to further cement the loyalty of the Bulgan clan, the Ringwraith groomed Garlin for this role, and nine years later installed him at Tûl Isra with the help of Tartas Izain.

The Storm King's strategy backfired. While Bulgan adherence to his will remained unquestioned, the imposition of a ruler who had been a direct subordinate to Ny Chennacatt was too much for many in Sîrayn to bear. The enemies of Clan Bulgan attempted a coup in 1422 and succeeded in killing Garlin. Infuriated at this challenge to his authority, Akhôrahil recalled Trabain from Zajantak and sent him at the head of the East Wind to put down the rebellion and assume the title of Tarb himself.

A last-ditch effort to resolve the troubles on the Storm King's western frontiers so that he could concentrate his attention on the situation in Sîrayn was launched in the spring of 1424. The West Wind, under the command of a new warlord, Aganzagar of Tantûrak, gathered at the oasis of Fult, facing the road to Norjadar. Sakulbâr of Anbalukkhôr had recently perished at the hands of one of Akhôrahil's Slayers, and a pro-Storm King faction was contending for power at Zadan an-Adûn. If the insurgents succeeded in winning over the Anbalukkhôrians, the West Wind would be assured of strong naval support for their attack. Unfortunately for Aganzagar, the reports he had received of this faction's strength were greater than it was in reality. The coup failed, and so did the campaign.

Aganzagar felt that Anbalukkhôr was unstable enough for him to intervene directly, but the lord of Ny Chennacatt forbade him to take action, as he was needed in the east. Trabain's rule over Sîrayn lasted only three short years until another uprising led by Clan Másra overthrew him and seized the government in 1436. For the next two centuries and more, the Shadow in the South would be too preoccupied with this highly unfavorable turn of events in Sîrayn, allowing a respite for the Free Peoples of the west.

But Akhôrahil did not forget his designs against Tulwang. On the contrary; the west remained a constant mote in the dark recesses of his thought. Yet in all his meditation on the matter one obstacle loomed above all others: Bellakar. Under the Captain of Ships, the Tumakveh fleet had become the greatest naval power in the South, and so long as it remained strong and united, he could not hope to take Tulwang.

How could the Storm King weaken this realm? Surveying its past, it seemed to him that every disaster that befell the Tumakveh had only made them stronger in the sequel. But the realm of the Tumakveh lay on the other side of the Azra'm-Miraz, guarded by powerful allies and leagues of desert uncounted. He could not overcome Bellakar by force of arms, but by intrigue and deception he might poison their kingdom. For the ever-patient Ringwraith, the future would provide him with the tools he needed to do this.

THE TUMAKVEH DYNASTY

The ruling house of Bellakar arose from a clan of landowning gentry, similar to many in colonial Bellakar. Primarily of Dúnadan lineage, they also claimed Bellanara descent, something rare in the Númenórean domains. They were more tightly knit than most of the great families of Bellakar, and were both fortunate and unfortunate in having little connection to the wealthy trading families of the coastal city-states—unfortunate, because they had fewer riches and friends in Númenor than some families; fortunate, because these two traits made them ideal middlemen in political squabbles in the Bâitha'n-Kadîr.

Two talented Tumakveh, Bêlzagar Striker and Zagarthôr Seaborne, made the family's reputation in the wars that ended the Second Age. A third, Zimrêbal Ironhand, used this reputation and his own skills to earn a royal sceptre for the family. He became the first king of Bellakar.

A primary strength of the Tumakveh over the generations was their willingness to overturn the tradition of patrilineal inheritance that was so important to most Númenórean nobility. The elders of the Tumakveh would, at regular intervals, hold a family gathering, the Invocate, to determine ways of improving the status of the clan and judging whether members of any branch were doing dishonor to it. While Bellakarian law did not permit living holders of Tumakveh wealth to be deprived of it by a family declaration, the Invocate could, and did, change business agreements and alter lines of inheritance to keep property from being estranged from family interests and to punish family members who behaved badly or with too much independence.

The Invocate also took an unabashed interest in improving the bloodlines of the Tumakveh. Occasionally they would disinherit family members or relations considered inferior in descent or behavior. More often, the Invocate would arrange marriages, gifts of income and adoptions to ensure that the best blood in the family, along with whatever could be gathered in from elsewhere in Bellakar and Endor, would be carried on to new generations.

Although the kings of Bellakar would always tout their distinguished and noble lineage in official documents and speeches, the Invocate, often hidden in the background of Bellakarian politics, was always waiting to pass judgment on the rulers of the kingdom and arrange for the succession to change to represent the best interests of the family and the realm.

Each descendent line of Bellakarian kings was given customary status within the family by an "Entailment," a legal writ created by the Invocate. Zimrêbal Ironhand and his direct descendants were the First Entail. Seven others carried the family through three thousand years of the Third Age and into the Fourth.

Name	Born	Reigned	Died	Notes
		FIRST ENTAIL		
Zimrêbal	310	340-395 (55)	395 (85)	AKA Ironhand
Abâruzôr	362	395-443 (48)	443 (81)	AKA the Impetuous
Bêlphazân	422	443-495 (52)	495 (73)	
Imruzîr	470	488-535 (47)	535 (65)*	
Zadunzîr	499		533 (34)†	
		SECOND ENTAIL		
Urdubâr	513	535-628 (93)	628 (115)	grandson of Imruzîr; AKA Arud Tumakveh I
Zâyunzîr	560		625 (65)	
Êruzôr	605	628-660 (42)	660 (55)	
Avalôzîr	634	660-698 (38)	698 (64)	
Zimrukhôr	671	698-741 (43)	741 (70)	
Zimrubêl	711	741-787 (46)	787 (76)	princess; marries Nîlûhîn
		THIRD ENTAIL		
Nîlûhîn	717	741-795 (54)	795 (78)	
Narkuzîr I	763	795-840 (45)	854 (91)	AKA the Courageous
Artârik I	783	840-884 (44)	884 (101)†	brother of Narkuzîr I; AKA an-Aranî
Êruzagar	828	884-889 (5)	889 (61)†	great nephew of Artârik, grandson of Narkuzîr by an older daughter; AKA the Warmaker
		THE TEDJIN YOKE		
Joam-Tuv	842	890-905 (15)	905 (63)	
Joam-Kator	868	905-938 (33)	938 (70)	
Ogtaï	881	938-952 (14)	952 (71)	AKA the Bloodmaker
		FOURTH ENTAIL		
Adûnuzîr	867	905-938 (33)	938 (71)	
Arphazân	889	938-975 (37)	975 (86)	
Narkuzîr II	922	975-1010 (35)	1010 (88)	AKA Ervak
Arzagar	961	1010-1053 (43)	1053 (92)	AKA Imruphazgân
Minulzîr	965		?	2nd son of Narkuzîr II
		FIFTH ENTAIL		
Anîzîr	1009	1053-1095 (42)	1095 (86)	
Karbuzîr	1049	1095-1138 (43)	1138 (89)	
Balkuzôr	1092	1138-1182 (44)	1182 (90)	
Bêlphazân II	?	1182-1235 (53)	1235 (?)	descendant of Arzagar
Sakalkhâd	?	1235-1290 (55)	1290 (?)	
Kadarzagar	1235	1290-1324 (34)	1324 (89)	brother of Bêlphazân II
Urduzîr	1302	1324-1378 (54)	1378 (76)	
Ûrêzagar	1340	1378-1422 (44)	1422 (82)	great-grandson of Sakalkhâd
Urshuzîr	?		1399 (?)†	son of Sakalkhâd
Êruhil	1388	1422-1483 (61)	1483 (95)	son of Urshuzîr; AKA the Virtuous
Bêlkhôr I	1453	1483-1550 (67)	1550 (97)	AKA Aruyati

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Pelardur
Umbar
Ardúvir
Ilfaduk
Batân an-Sakal
Baal Dalajaf
(Coast of the Bleak Shores)
Kes Isarn
Kref Urt
Kref Tuvvaj
The
Dune
Sea
Dûsalan
Cape
Of
Mardruak
Kes Enbal
Batân an-Sakal
Kes Nilja
Urud an-Khibil (Monastery of the True Path)
Thri Zirakan
Zimrênzil
Narik-zadan
Joam
Auz Hulja
Kes Ebb
Kes Arik
The
Burning
Walk
Saz Nejja
Auz Marda
Nykkea
Batân an-Sakal
Sarnak Hor
Hazaj Tollin
MARDRUAK
Kalz Kalemej
(Bay of Squids)
Rôthurush
Auz Bekar
Kes Susad
Zâyan an-Agan
(Field of Black Death)
Khibil Ephalak
Kas Torath
River
Tosith
Batân an-Sakal
FELAYJA
Kes Udil
Kes Weza
Kes Kriz
Saraj
Kalz
Yagup
Asayt Hor
Ayal Koyren
Kes Triha
Urid an-Abâr
Izindutârik
Nilûlondê
(Nilûlôni)
Ûrêzâyan
River
Sîres
Batân an-Sakal
Kes Zum
Kulijar
Lôkhurush
Esmer (Zimra-zadan
Suza Sumar
Auz Azunan
Korlea
Entôj
Batân an-Sakal
Bozisha-Dar
Har Shulam
Sulaj-Dar
Bozisha-
Miraz
Kâlab
an-Nithil
Ajesfa
Târik an-Narduvî
Dejka
Kalz Filha
(Bay of Corals)
Azra'm - Miraz
(Bay of Tulwang)
Tarkhesh
Balkuzôr
Batân an-Sakal
Bay of
Raishoul
Né Tava
BELLAZEN
North
0 20 40 60 80 100 150
Scale of Miles